A CAVALIER OF VIRGINIA

G·E·THEODORE ROBERTS

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WORKS OF

G. E. THEODORE ROBERTS

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L. C. PAGE & COMPANY

New England Building, Boston, Mass.

"FRANCIS DRURIE CAUTIONED HIS HEART NOT TO BE A FOOL." (*See page 66*)

A CAVALIER OF VIRGINIA

A ROMANCE

By

G. E. THEODORE ROBERTS

Author of "Brothers of Peril," "Captain Love," "Hemming the Adventurer," etc.

Illustrated by

LOUIS D. GOWING

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First Impression, March, 1910

Electrotyped and Printed by
THE COLONIAL PRESS
C. H. Simonds & Co., Boston, U. S. A.

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A
CAVALIER OF VIRGINIA

CHAPTER I

THE HOME-COMING

For the past six days — since first regaining the fringe of the settlements — the little force had been gradually disbanding. Woodsmen, trappers, pioneer farmers, traders, millers, planters, and gentlemen of rank and fortune — singly or by twos and threes, they had broken away and gone back to their homes and private affairs.

For two months they had campaigned in that alluring but menacing wilderness that lay, unfathomed, between the cultivated lands and the unknown West. Now, when the forest foliage was reddening under the frosts of late October, and a healthy regard for the rifles of the Virginian militia had been implanted in the shifty hearts of two tribes of savages, they felt free to return to their interrupted businesses and pleasures.

At last, where Saddle Hill Trail branches off from the king's highway, Master Francis Drurie and Captain Simeon Hewett drew rein and shook hands.

"Good luck to you, Frank!"

"And to you, Sim — God bless you!"

Then Hewett wheeled toward Saddle Hill, touched spur to his thin nag, and lifted his hat. Drurie returned the salute, and trotted eastward along the highway.

And thus had six companies of Virginian riflemen — men in homespun, buckskin, blue and gold, coonskin caps and laced hats — disbanded, without the sanction of general orders, or any blaring of trumpets. These were soldiers, not mummers. The rifle-work and the sword-work were over for the season. Their duty to their country was done for the time. God grant them to find their families still intact, their cabins and houses still standing, and their crops garnered in good order!

Francis Drurie's coat of fine blue cloth was patched and ripped and weather-stained. His hat was faded, and the gold lace on it tarnished beyond reburnishing. His saddle was black with wear and wet and sunburn. On his legs he wore breeches of buckskin; and his high boots of English leather had been replaced weeks before by beaded moccasins and fringed leggings. He

carried a long flint-lock rifle slung across his shoulders, pistols in his holsters, and a sword at his side.

His face was tanned to a red-brown as deep as an Indian's; and from that savage-hued mask his blue eyes shone out with startling brightness. His light brown hair, where it lay on his neck unpowdered, and tied with a narrow ribbon, was bleached by the sun to the shade of ripe corn-husks. He was slender of figure, and but little above the medium height of men of his race; but he was well-muscled and well-featured, thin and hard as a hound, and with courage in eyes and brow to be read at a glance. For all his service-worn equipment, and sixty days of campaigning, he sat straight and rode lightly.

At a gap in a hedge barred with rails, Francis Drurie dismounted. Here began a shaded path which he knew; and by it he would ride, coolly and free of dust, across the groves of Fairwood Manor and Admiral's Pride, and into the arms of his family. He lowered the rails, led his horse over and swung to the saddle.

The narrow path was carpeted with short, thin grass as soft as moss. The hoofs of his horse made no sound. Suddenly across the still air, fragrant with the breath of ripened leaves and mellow earth, and cones purpling in the sun, lifted a voice, singing.

Francis knew the voice; and these are the words of the verse he heard:

"Time is old and life is brief —
Then 'tis shame to prate of sorrow.
If to-day holds naught of grief,
Let the good God mind to-morrow.
Time is old, but Youth is strong;
Life is brief, but Love is long."

Francis drew rein, smiling. The singing had ceased, the sweet voice dropping to silence as suddenly as it had sprung upon the drowsy air. He reflected for a moment and then struck up the last verse of the familiar song.

"Ride ye south and ride ye north —
You'll be riding home to-morrow
Back from whence ye cantered forth
With your scars and weary sorrow.
Time is old and Death is strong;
Life is brief, but Love is long."

A moment's silence followed the conclusion of the young man's effort; then came a short, glad cry — stifled almost as soon as uttered — from somewhere down the woodland path. The tanned cheeks of the campaigner flushed at the sound. He waited, tense in the saddle. The horse began to fidget, knowing that

there was no ambush of painted savages to fear in the woodlands of the manor.

Puzzled by the silence, and wondering abashed at the note of that brief cry, Francis let the horse move forward; then on second thought he sprang to the ground, caught the reins up on one of the holsters, and walked briskly ahead. The horse followed quietly.

In this manner they moved along for a considerable distance, the young man expecting to catch sight of the girl at every turn of the path, and at every turn wondering more and more why she did not appear. He increased his pace, and soon saw the gleam of a white frock between the forest walls in front. *She was moving away from him.*

"Isobel, Isobel!" he called, and broke into a run.

She did not turn until he was within a few yards of her. Then she sprang aside, and faced him with feigned amazement in her splendid eyes. There was another emotion there which the amazement could have hidden only from persons with as little experience in such matters as young Drurie.

"Frank!" she cried.

Laughing, he tried to catch her in his arms; but she slipped out of his embrace, and held him away with one light hand. Her brow and cheeks were bright with fleeting colour. Her eyes looked past him,

dark as deep water, but bright as stars. Everything about her was bright, and yet of a brightness that was as tender as dimness — as tender as the half-lights of dusk and dawn. Though her eyes and hair were so dark that they often looked black, her skin was of a wonderful fairness. About her white neck gleamed a thin gold chain, holding just below the tender hollow of her throat a small gold cross set with pearls which Francis had given her on a birthday several years ago.

"Have you dropped from the tree-tops?" she asked.

Young Drurie did not answer immediately. He stood with his arms hanging at his sides, his forehead puckered ever so slightly, smiling, but with cross-lights of puzzled inquiry in his blue eyes.

"From the tree-tops, if you like — from thousands and thousands of miles of tree-tops — but it was harder than dropping, as Jumper, here, could tell you," he said. "But what tricks are you up to, Isobel?" he asked anxiously. "Why don't you laugh at me? Why don't you kiss me? Why don't you make fun of my shabby coat and brick-red face? You are not natural, Isobel. I heard you singing a long time ago — and I sent a voice back to you. And you heard it, I think. Then why did you turn around and run straight away from me? That was not kind, Isobel."

She did not meet his steady regard.

"I did not run," she said.

He let that pass for the little it was worth.

"You were sorry when I went away. I thought you would be glad when I got back," he said gravely.

"I am glad!" she cried. "You know I am glad!"

"It is not for me to presume to deny what you say, dear; but you do not behave as if you were very glad," he returned gently. "You are changed, little girl. I did not expect to find you changed in any way. I have always thought that you would be as glad to see me home again as you were sorry to see me go away."

"When did you think about it?" she asked, mock incredulity in her voice. "Do you expect me to believe that you, a full-fledged soldier of Virginia, gave any time to such foolish reflections? Be honest, Frank, and tell me when you thought about whether I should be glad or sorry to see you home again. I am sure it was not when you were fighting with the savages, or eating in their lodges, or riding through the forest with your comrades."

The young man gazed at her in undisguised amazement.

"Why do you ask me such idiotic questions, Isobel?" he complained. "But I shall answer them, though I

do not think them sincere. Honestly, then, I often made pictures of our meeting in my mind — while we marched, and when I lay in my blankets at night; and ever since I parted with Hewett at the crossroads I've been thinking how fine it would be to — to — "

"To what?" she asked.

"To kiss you again," he said.

"Oh!" exclaimed the girl softly, her eyes intent on his beaded moccasins.

"I really thought I was going to do it. My mind was set on it," he ventured.

"And you didn't, after all."

"I don't kiss by force," he said, smiling forlornly.

"Frank," she said in a changed voice, "you must realize now that we are no longer children."

"Children!" he cried in mild indignation. "Children! Who says we are children? True, you are only eighteen — but I am twenty-two. Children don't command companies of riflemen campaigning in the wilderness." He laughed boyishly at his own big talk. "But, in all seriousness," he added, "why have I not as much right to kiss you, now that I am a man, as I had when I was an unappreciative child?"

"But you know that you have not," she replied quietly.

A change came to Francis Drurie's tanned face.

"A CHANGE CAME TO FRANCIS DRURIE'S TANNED FACE."

The whimsical light faded from his blue eyes, and his lips straightened a little. "You are wiser than I am, my dear Isobel," he said. "You realize my position better than I do myself. It is evident that you have given some thought to the matter. The elder sons — the heirs to the tobacco-fields and slaves — are the fortunate fellows who retain the privilege of kissing their lady friends after arriving at the age of manhood. The poor, unfortunate devils who have their own way to make in the world must learn discretion all of a sudden. I'd not thought of that, but I see the good sense of it clear enough. I shall now kiss your hand, my dear, by way of greeting between old playmates after an absence of two months — and then I'll let the argument drop. May I venture?"

"No, you may not," she replied with spirit. "You have spoken very unkindly. Because I ask you to remember that we are no longer little children, you instantly speak as if — as if I do not care for you any more because — because you are not the heir to Admiral's Pride. I do not care for Admiral's Pride! You are — very unkind."

"I beg your pardon most humbly, Isobel," said Francis anxiously. "God knows I do not want to think that! We've been the best of friends ever since you came to Virginia, little girl; so why squabble just

because you have suddenly become impressed by your great age? That would be childish, certainly. I am sorry that I have caused you any anxiety — and still more sorry that I have spoken unkindly. But if your voice shakes again, dear, as it did just now, I'll kiss you — though they hang me for it."

Isobel looked swiftly into his eyes, and as swiftly away again. Then, as if working for a wager, she asked him questions about the wilderness, the savage tribes, the fighting, the marching, and the wild animals he had encountered. And while she questioned and he answered they moved forward, side by side, with the horse close at their heels.

The path was so narrow that his right hand presently touched her left. In a second their fingers clasped and held; and so they moved along, talking briskly, though somewhat vaguely, and each pretending unconsciousness of what had happened. In the depths of the woods they crossed a low stone wall that separated Fairwood Manor from Admiral's Pride.

"Now, I must go back to the manor. I am spending the day with Uncle Henry," said the girl. As she spoke she gently withdrew her hand from the young man's. He did not try to retain it. He made no sign of knowing that his hand had been anywhere but in his own pocket.

"And to-morrow?" he asked.

"I shall be at home to-morrow," she replied.

"Then I'll ride over in the morning," he said. "I have some interesting specimens of picture-writing for your father's collection."

He swung to the saddle, lifted his hat and let the eager horse start off at a sharp trot. Where the path broke through the underbrush into a wide avenue that led up to the house of Admiral's Pride he turned and glanced back. The girl was still standing where he had left her, gazing down the green pathway. She blew a kiss to him and vanished in a twinkling.

CHAPTER II

THE BROTHERS

In those days there were not many finer estates in Virginia than Admiral's Pride, and few finer residences than Captain Paul Drurie's. The estate had been first settled and cleared, and the house built by the captain's father, old Rear-Admiral Drurie. The admiral, in his day, had been a hero in the eyes and hearts of the English public, and was affectionately known in every ship of the navy as "Hot-Shot Bill."

In front of the house lay six acres of velvety lawn and well-tended shrubberies. The park itself — woodlands of oak, walnut, and cedar — covered one hundred acres. The house, with its offices and lawns, kennels and stables, occupied the centre of the park. Back of this block of land were the negro quarters, the great cattle-sheds, the windmill and tobacco-houses, and hundreds of acres of meadow, pasture, and forest, and the fields where the corn, tobacco, and sugar-cane were raised. Yes, it was a fine home to which young Master Francis Drurie rode back, in his shabby coat

and Indian moccasins, astride his weather-blackened saddle.

A couple of hound puppies were the first of the household to catch sight of the horseman. They charged across the lawns to meet him, yelping with delight at the prospect of a little excitement. When the man spoke to them, and they saw that the raw-boned horse was no other than Jumper, their demonstrations immediately took on a subdued note.

Next an old hound, gray of muzzle, and with one eye like a clouded opal, got to his feet on the lower gallery, sniffed the air inquiringly for a moment, and then descended to the lawn at a dignified trot. This was Bellringer, who had led the pack for seven years, and for three had loafed about the galleries, honourably retired from the field because of stiffening joints and a thickening windpipe. At sight of him Francis drew rein and dismounted.

The dog quickened his pace a little, and began to twist his long tan-and-white body as the lad drew near. He settled lower on his legs, drew back his gray upper lip and displayed a couple of white fangs. From deep in his rusty throat came a gurgling growl — a growl as expressive of welcome and joy and love as any human cry. He lifted himself stiffly to his full height and planted his front paws on the young man's

breast; and, standing thus, he yelped with all his strength.

It was old Bellringer's yelping that announced to everybody in and about the house that the militiaman was home again from the wilderness. The captain left his book open on the study table and hobbled to the lawn. The ancient butler — who had been a gunner's-mate aboard the captain's ship — followed close. Mrs. Drurie sped from her bedroom to the rail of the upper gallery, looked eagerly about and, with a little scream of delight, turned and fled back again, down the great staircase and out to the lawn. From the majestic old cook in her red-and-yellow turban, to the youngest housemaid in spotless white cotton and white headkerchief, all the black house servants appeared and formed a group behind the master, the mistress, and the privileged old white butler.

Francis Drurie embraced and kissed his mother, shook the captain's hand for a full minute — all the time the two grinned feelingly at each other without a word — and then gave a cordial grip to the old hero who had descended comfortably from serving his guns on the seas, under both Hot-Shot Bill and Captain Paul, to serving soups and wines ashore. To the group behind them he waved a hand, and called a good-natured greeting.

"Where is John?" he asked presently, looking up at the house.

"John? Why, John is shooting with Fairwood to-day," replied the captain.

Mrs. Drurie smiled.

"I think he is not paying much attention to the birds. Isobel is there, too," she said.

At that the captain turned squarely upon her.

"So that is what you have in your mind!" he exclaimed amusedly.

"He is certainly paying much more attention to her than he used to," replied the lady.

The campaigner gave a keen ear to this conversation, but said not a word. As was usual with him, he thought the more for saying nothing.

John Drurie and Mr. Fairwood appeared early in the afternoon, for the news of the Indian fighter's return from the wilds had sped over three plantations with the despatch of the wind. John was honestly pleased to see his brother safe and sound again; but it looked as if Mr. Fairwood, of Fairwood Manor, was even more pleased.

"I heard one of the plowboys yelling to another across a forty-acre field that you had got home again," he said. "There was a covey of partridges in the air, right in front of my gun. Well, lad, I let them go.

There's not a bird that flies would have tempted me to wait and pull trigger. 'Frank's home,' I sang out to John, and ran for the house, leaving my dogs in the stubble. Yes, lad, I put my best foot foremost, you may depend upon it. I knew old Gunner's-mate Joskins would be mixing one of those three-decker punches of his."

True for you, Mr. Fairwood — Joskins had mixed the punch!

Now is my time to speak of a punch that was more famous, in its day, than many poets and warriors and statesmen. Though one could drink good liquor at Admiral's Pride at any hour of the twenty-four and at any season of the year, it was only for special occasions that the great punch was brewed. The Admiral had invented it, and named it after his flag-ship. Before his death, he had taught the secret of it to Joskins. A few prigs called it the "Bellerophon"; but by the family, the intimate friends and the butler it was frankly spoken of as the "Billy-rough-un." Tradition had it that "Hot-Shot Bill" had won promotion and recognition in high places by this punch more than by his fighting and seamanship. I have not a doubt that this is true — for the navy was full of exceptional fighters (so full that the Lords of the Admiralty sometimes grew quite tired of hearing

of their deeds of valour), but had only one punch that was above criticism. The inventor had given the receipt of the punch to his sovereign and, in return, had been invited to dinner. This was the drink that was mixed by the ex-gunner's mate Joskins, in honour of Francis Drurie's return from campaigning in the West.

But Francis was not in a mood to enjoy it fully. He felt a restlessness that he could not account for — a restlessness of the mind rather than the body — and a depression of spirit equally unreasonable. Fresh from a bath, clothed in the fine linen and unstained garments of prosperity, with the great punch before him on the gleaming mahogany, and his father, his brother, and Fairwood, of Fairwood Manor, near him, yet he moved uneasily in his chair, and glanced continually through the long window of the dining-room into the garden where the gold of the sunlight was deepening on stalk and leaf.

The talk seemed trivial to him, though it was the talk of his class and his country — of crops, dinners, men, dogs, and horses — subjects that had always interested him keenly until the present moment. Even the incidents of the campaign had dwindled to insignificance in his eyes. In answer to the questions of the men he told them of the skirmishing, the hard-

ships, the fine shooting of the pioneers, the customs of the tribes, and what-not; but he spoke without his usual warmth — a fact that was as noticeable to the others as to himself.

"You are tired, lad," said the captain anxiously. "You should turn in and sleep the clock around."

"No, sir, I don't feel tired," replied Francis. "I have had plenty of sleep in the last week since we got out of the dangerous country. We slept lightly before that out of respect for our scalps. But I feel a trifle restless, and that's a fact. It may be owing to the sudden change from constant alertness and poor fare to this sort of thing." He looked at the great silver bowl. "Perhaps I have acquired the habit of work. It may be that I miss the fatigue and excitement of the life I have been living for the past two months."

"Cheer up, lad," said Mr. Fairwood. "You'll get fatigue and excitement enough next week, for we hunt the Dudley country on Monday, the Swan River country on Wednesday, and Saddle Hill on Saturday."

"Good!" exclaimed Francis, for he was a keen sportsman, and the best gentleman rider in the county, either at flat-racing, cross-country, or steeple-chasing.

"But Jumper looks thin and unfit," said the captain. "He'll need a deal of graining before Monday."

"Don't hunt him for a fortnight, lad," advised

Mr. Fairwood. "Let him rest, and take the pick of my stud until he is fit for work again."

"But you offered me a mount, sir, until Snowball's shoulder hardens," said John, smiling.

Mr. Fairwood turned a haughty glance in the speaker's direction. He had gray eyes, easily warmed to good nature or chilled to displeasure. He was famous for saying what he felt.

"But?" he questioned, in a voice of indignation. "What d'ye mean, John, by saying 'but' to me? I offered you a mount, sir, and you may be sure that the offer still holds. Any friend of mine, or son of a friend, or friend of a friend, is welcome to a horse from my stables, or a bottle from my cellar, whenever he wants it. But did I offer you the best? No, John, I did not. You will have to put up with the second best."

John was too thoroughly abashed to even try to reply. Francis felt sorry for him, but could not help thinking that an occasional facer of the kind would do him no harm. John took it too much for granted that the best of everything should be his. The captain looked neither abashed, sorry, or amused. He refilled Mr. Fairwood's glass from the half-pint ladle, then looked fixedly at his elder son.

"How is it," he asked, "that Admiral's Pride is so short of hunters?"

"I — I do not know, exactly," replied John.

"But you should know," retorted the captain. "I put the stables in your charge six months ago. If you cannot manage the stables alone, how will you ever run the whole estate? John, I am deeply distressed. Here we are — and for the first time in the history of Admiral's Pride, I'll wager — short of horses at the start of the hunting season."

Mr. Fairwood could not bear to hear any one taken to task. He gulped his punch, stared round the room with a swiftly melting eye, and at last focused his gaze upon the captain.

"Come, Paul, you must not be so hard on the youngster," he cried. "He is at the age when most men are fools, anyway. All he thinks of now is dressing himself up in fine clothes from London, but he may outgrow that. He may make a fine, sensible man some day, Heaven knows."

Captain Drurie roared with laughter. Francis turned his head away, to hide a smile that he could not keep from his face. John glared at Mr. Fairwood, reckless with the sting of injured pride.

"Do you realize," cried the furious heir, "that you are speaking of a man of twenty-five years of age — of a bachelor of Oxford University, sir; of a gentleman and a scholar?"

Fairwood, who thought he had been figuring very tactfully as a peacemaker, gaped at the young man in pained astonishment. Fortunately the ridiculous side of the affair struck him before his rage exploded, and he joined the captain in wide-throated laughter. John sprang to his feet and marched from the room.

When his seniors had finished their laughter, Francis said: "You were too sharp, Mr. Fairwood. He will sulk for a week."

CHAPTER III

ISOBEL'S FUTURE

BEFORE leaving the dining-table and the silver bowl Francis won from Mr. Fairwood an acknowledgment of the fact that John had not been treated fairly. The captain took no part in the argument, but sat far back in his chair, with his eyes turned to a portrait of Hot-Shot Bill. It was a belief of his that two are enough for any argument. As soon as Mr. Fairwood had admitted that he really thought very highly of John, and had not meant more than half of what he had said, Francis excused himself and left the room.

Francis found John up-stairs, in a little room full of books, sulking in the window-seat.

"John," said the campaigner, "Mr. Fairwood wants you to know that he did not mean what he said of you, and that he is sorry he said it. He has the highest regard for your scholarship, John."

"Scholarship!" cried the other. "What is the use of scholarship in this barbaric hole? Here a rifleman

in a coon-skin cap is of more account than a poet; and if a gentleman can stick to the back of a half-broken colt he is looked upon as the possessor of a liberal education. Horses and dogs, tobacco and rum, fighting and sleeping — Lord, there is not a man in the colony capable of lifting his brain above these things!"

"Oh, come now, John, you are talking like an idiot," said Francis, laughing good-naturedly.

"If I talk like an idiot, I am driven to it," replied John. "Why was I sent to England and Europe for my education if I am not to be allowed to continue the life? What do I care about the stables? The grooms can manage the feeding of the horses quite well without my help. I have more important work to do; and, by Heaven, I'll do it!"

"What is the work?" asked Francis.

"Why should I tell *you?*" retorted John. "There is only one person in Virginia who cares the snap of a finger about my work."

"Who is that?" asked Francis.

"Isobel," replied the elder brother, without a moment's hesitation, and looking at Francis, as if he expected some indication of special interest.

"You are fortunate," said the other indifferently. And then: "I should like to know what it is that interests Isobel."

"A history of Rome."

"Rome?"

"Yes, and in verse."

Francis was honestly astonished. He had never suspected John of the staying power to attempt so monumental a work as a history of any kind, either in verse or prose. Of course he had often heard the other speak of his work, but had never seen anything of it except a few dismal lyrics.

"Is it done?" he asked, in an awestruck voice.

John was disgusted with the question.

"This sort of thing is not done in two months," he replied superciliously. "It is rather more difficult than a campaign against a handful of savages."

"And will, no doubt, be responsible for more deaths," retorted Francis, as he hastened from the room. He had never, in all his life, found John in quite such a beastly humour.

Next morning, shortly after breakfast, Francis Drurie set out on foot to call on Mr. Richard Dariza, Isobel's father. The Dariza place was named Hopeland, and lay just the other side of Fairwood Manor. It was a small estate, with a small, new house upon it, and had once been a part of the manor. Francis carried a parcel, in which were a number of examples of Indian picture-writing for Mr. Dariza and a necklace

of strange gems for Isobel. He crossed the Fairwood lands without attracting the attention of any one at the house — to have done so would have meant delay and a second breakfast — and arrived at the Dariza place just as the master himself stepped from the breakfast-room to the gallery.

Richard Dariza was a Spaniard by birth. Years ago, in his native land, he had been well known in high places as the Señor Ricardo Alcazardo da Riza. There had been trouble of a family and political nature, and Da Riza had Anglicized his name and turned his back for ever on his own country. A year or two later he married Miss Fairwood, of Virginia. This happened in London, and for twelve years they made their home in England. Two children were born to them — the first a boy, the second a girl.

When Isobel was in her fifth year the mother fell very ill. This was in midwinter. Dariza was almost crazed with terror, and immediately removed his family to the south of France. There Mistress Dariza recovered something of her strength, but she talked continually of her home in Virginia, and grieved for it. As soon as the doctors said that she was strong enough to undertake a sea-voyage her husband engaged passage for his family from Bristol to the great colony. The voyage was made in safety, but within a month of their

arrival, at the home of her people, Mistress Dariza died.

Another great blow awaited the unfortunate Spaniard. It fell some ten years later when his son, Richard Fairwood St. George Dariza, a young lieutenant in the navy, quarrelled with a senior officer, killed him in fair fight, and vanished as completely from the knowledge of the Admiralty and his family as if he had descended into his grave.

Dariza's thin face and dark eyes lighted with pleasure at sight of young Drurie. He hastened across the gallery and down the steps, and caught his visitor's hand in both of his.

"To see you again is like wine to my tired spirit," he said.

Francis flushed with pleasure at the greeting. Such words, from his father or Mr. Fairwood, would have sounded foolish and stilted, but from the master of Hopeland they were natural and sincere. He returned the pressure of the other's thin hands. Dariza led the way back to the breakfast-room. He looked more like a man of eighty than fifty-five. Tall and of frail build, his two great griefs had bent him, body and spirit, and thinned his blood like a fever. And he had a way, recently acquired, of turning his head suddenly and lifting a furtive hand to his eyes. Some-

times he would smile to himself, very tenderly and longingly, and that was more pitiful to see than tears.

Francis refused a second breakfast, but accepted his host's offer of coffee and tobacco. Isobel soon entered the room, and spoke to Francis in subdued voice and with a fleeting glance. He had already given the sheets of bark and skin containing the picture-writing to Dariza, and now he extended the Indian necklace to the girl.

"Here is a little gift that I have brought out of the wilderness to you, Isobel," he said. "I was told that it once belonged to an Indian princess."

Isobel flushed and hesitated.

"It is very valuable," she said, and glanced appealingly at her father.

"Take it, dear," said Dariza. "You need have no scruples about accepting any gift from Francis Drurie."

Both knew what he meant, for of late he had often spoken of the place that Francis had taken in his affections since the loss of his son.

Drurie fastened the splendid, glowing thing about the girl's neck. His hands trembled as he did it, and a mad desire to stoop and touch his lips to the white flesh beneath his fingers went through him like fire. But instead of that he said, in a level voice: "It has

a difficult catch, but I think I have fastened it properly."

Soon afterward Isobel left the room. The two men sat silent for a long time, sipping their coffee and smoking their silver tobacco-pipes. Clay, as material for pipes, was not yet popular with the gentry, either in England or the colonies.

"Francis," said Dariza at last. "I feel that I am not much longer for this world."

Drurie looked at him in consternation.

"It is so," continued the other. "No skill of ours can alter it — the message is in my heart. I am an old man — not in years, but in life — and the taste for earthly pleasures is dead in me. I think that I shall never again see the tobacco harvested from these fields."

He paused and smiled gently at his friend. Francis paled a little, and breathed quickly, but could find no word to say.

"Do not pity me for feeling the approach of death," continued Dariza. "That which seems horrible to you, with youth and courage and love your servants, is a thing sweet to me. Death, I take it, is no more than a change of habitation and a widening of vision; a change from this narrow, grief-stricken house to a place where the eyes of love shall brighten, never

again to dim with suffering; to a home that shelters no dread of disruption. There my dearest friend awaits me — the woman I love — in that bright house where neither pain nor misunderstanding may enter."

He leaned forward, his arms upon the table, and his bright, dark eyes holding the younger man's fascinated gaze.

"I do not speak as a poet or a dreamer," he said, "but as a man who has lived and suffered, and taken joy of the world, and read men and books, and sifted the teachings of the churches, without fear or prejudice, as food for my needs. So I am ready to go joyfully — save for one fear — one regret."

Drurie tried to ask the question.

"It is this," went on Dariza. "My boy may still live, disgraced, suffering, and unbefriended."

There was such agony in the old man's eyes that Francis turned away.

"I have none of this fear at thought of leaving Isobel," said Dariza. "She is with relatives and friends, sheltered and loved. But my boy! God, if it is that he lives, and is in need of trust and tenderness, and should come home some day and find me gone!"

"Do you think he may be — be alive?" asked Francis, scarce above a whisper. "If so, sir, how is it that he has not come home before this?" His voice

grew surer. "In good fortune or evil, Dick Dariza will never lack a friend so long as I draw breath."

"Noble heart," said the old man. He extended a thin hand, and clutched Drurie's wrist. "My heart aches with the doubt of his fate," he whispered. "How gladly should I welcome the sure news of his safety in death. If he lives, the life of the outcast is his. Dear God, why did I let him from my sight?"

He hid his face in his hands and wept silently. Francis, unspeakably embarrassed, did his best to comfort him. He laid a timid hand on the thin, quaking shoulders.

"Do not fret, sir," he murmured. "If Dick is dead you may be sure that he died like a gentleman, for all this talk of his crime of killing a superior. If he lives, then if ever I hear of him I shall find him, though the search lead me to the ends of the earth. And in whatever position I find him — high or low, rich or poor, in bondage or in power — I shall claim him as my friend, and serve him with all my heart and strength."

At last the stricken old man grew calm, and looked his young friend fairly in the face again.

"I had no right to show you my sorrow," he said. He gazed through the long windows and across the sunlit lawns to the rounded woods of his brother-in-

law's park. "For Isobel's future I do not worry," he said. "She is sheltered, and the world is on her side. Henry Fairwood will be her guardian when I am gone. He loves her as if she were his own daughter. But I do not think his guardianship will last long. That a younger man will soon take his charge from him I have not a doubt."

Young Drurie's blood drummed in his ears, and he felt his cheeks tingling. What was Dariza going to say, he wondered? A sweet hope flooded his brain and heart like music. But the old man did not look at him. Quite unconscious of the young man's emotion, he said:

"John is a good fellow. For myself I like men of a more adventurous spirit; but the other kind makes the more comfortable husband. Yes, John is a safe man; and if a young lady takes a fancy to him I consider it a safe fancy. If he does not catch my eye as some others do the fault is mine; for, a man of books and reveries myself, my taste is all for men of action. I saw a deal of sword-iron and smoke when I was a young man, and books have seemed a limp and sapless enterprise to me, in spite of my honest application to them. The reading of love-passages will never take the place of kissing; and even so, when I follow the turns and chances of armed conflict, up and down printed

pages, some smoke from my own youth and a veil of blood of my own spilling crawl between my vision and the book. Then I see the truth — the worth of the reality and the worth of the shadow."

Francis murmured a polite assent to the old gentleman's words. Had they been spoken in Dutch he would have done the same, for not a phrase had he heard after the reference to John. So that was settled, was it? Isobel loved John! That explained her unusual quiet and her objection to being kissed.

CHAPTER IV

AN OFFER OF EMPLOYMENT

FRANCIS had not been home long when a letter arrived for the captain, from Bristol, in the care of Stephen Todd, master of the good ship *Merryweather*. It was from a wealthy baronet, who had been a shipmate of the captain's in the old days; and the heart of it was the offer to Francis of a berth with an expedition bound for Hudson's Bay. It was quite evident that the captain had been corresponding with his old friend, and had not failed to state his younger son's qualifications for any adventurous work on sea or land.

The expedition was to sail from Bristol in May of the next year. It was a venture of the Royal Company of London and Bristol Adventurers, designed to establish a settlement in the wilderness of the far north and open up a trade in furs and precious metals with the natives of that little-known land. The French were already at work there, but all the world knew that it was English territory. The expedition would

consist of four vessels at least, all armed like pirates, and each carrying two commanding officers — the military commander and the sailing-master, or navigator. Francis would be given the military command of one of the vessels.

The baronet went on to say that there was nothing unsound about the venture; that he himself had taken shares in it to the cost of five thousand pounds, and expected a return of at least fifty per cent. profit. In all sincerity he advised his old brother-in-arms to invest at least a thousand in it. He would reserve shares to that amount, on the chance.

This letter put even the hunting in a second place with the people of the three estates. Francis accepted the offer upon the moment of hearing it, but his relatives and friends fell into argument, the smoke and dust of which did not settle for a month. When they talked to Francis one would think that their lives, not his life, were to be risked. When they spoke to the captain one would think that their money, not his, was to be cast upon the waters. By the way they talked it over among themselves one would think that some crime was contemplated by the captain and Francis.

Only Mr. Dariza and Joskins were in sympathy with the adventurers. Mr. Dariza explained, at great length, that an expedition of this kind was a greater thing

than any crop of tobacco that had ever been raised and sold in Virginia.

"If our fathers had all sat at home," said he, "who would now be taking their ease in Admiral's Pride and Fairwood Manor?"

As for the old ex-gunner's-mate, Joskins, why, he was in two minds about whether or not he should join the expedition himself.

"I'd do it, beyond a doubt, if it wasn't that I be well-nigh seventy-five year old and so infernal totterish in the legs. Aye, Master Frank, there be no life in the whole wide world equal in sport and eddication to burnin' powder and makin' new landfalls. Ye'll be sightin' pirates and Frenchmen, I take it."

John's objections to his brother's joining the expedition were half-hearted; but his argument against the investment of a thousand pounds in the stock of the Royal Company of London and Bristol Adventurers was sincere enough, and became in time far too persistent to suit the captain. Master John was told to mind his own business.

At last it became an accepted fact that Francis should set sail for England in about seven months' time, with his father's investment in his pocket, and in Bristol take command of his ship and up-anchor for the desolate seas of the north. When every member of

the household was convinced of this the captain said: "And now we'll hear no more about it at the dinner-table." So that was the end of it as a subject of general argument and ill nature. But in the quiet of her own room Mrs. Drurie was already knitting stockings of amazing thickness for her baby to wear in the chilly north.

Francis was overjoyed at the prospect of so good a berth with so enterprising an expedition. The love of the sea was in his blood; and, though he had won his spurs in the forests of the West, with inland planters and pioneer riflemen beside him and painted savages in front, it was his intention to win fame as a sea fighter and to try his hand as soon as possible at a ship-load of Frenchmen.

He saw in this offer of the baronet's the initial step to a whole life full of adventure and glory. From distinguishing himself as the military commander of one of the company's ships, he would go on to a commission in the royal navy. He had an idea that some day the picture of another admiral would hang in the dining-room of Admiral's Pride. But as surely as he was satisfied with his worldly prospects, just as surely was he dissatisfied with the present state and future promise of something that lay — though he would not admit it — still closer to his heart.

Mr. Dariza's plan for Isobel's future did not suit him at all. Isobel's attitude suited him still less. Before, ever since their very first meeting, she had always treated him as her dearest friend. He could find neither comfort nor reason in this transferring of affection from himself to his brother John. It was unjust. If he had been to Isobel's taste when she was seventeen years of age, why was he not still to her taste? In what way had he changed between his departure for the West and his return? What had he done to lose first place in her affections?

And what, in the name of all the devils, had John done to gain it? When Isobel's kisses had meant little to Francis, they had been his for the asking. Before that again, when they had been a decided embarrassment, he had not been able to avoid them. And now that he wanted to kiss her — when, to tell the truth, he could think of nothing that he wanted to do quite so much — she would not let him.

Labouring under the absurd belief that he knew the ways of women as well as he knew the science of savage warfare and the anatomy of a horse, he decided that Isobel Dariza was mercenary — and that her father was mercenary — and that all the blessings of life, save hard knocks, were reserved for elder sons. He came to this conclusion without heat, reasoning

coolly, according to his knowledge of women and the world.

Isobel made two attempts to discuss the prospective voyage with Francis; but his reserve was such that she did not again refer to the subject until months afterward.

A small seaport town lay within ten miles of Admiral's Pride. There were coasting-schooners, flat-boats from up the river, and now and then a vessel from the deep sea. The whole town smacked of foreign lands and brisk adventure. There was a wharf, and there were old sailors in their cottages and salty fellows drinking in the tavern. Here was the square in which the cargoes of Africans were sold to the planters, and here were long storehouses in which bales and hogsheads of tobacco were stowed, awaiting their places in the holds of east-bound ships.

To this place, as the winter progressed, Francis Drurie paid frequent visits, riding over on Jumper at the expense of good hunting. It was like standing on the threshold of a room in which he knew that he was soon to do great deeds; or, more aptly, on the porch of a vast house full of persons and chambers as yet unknown to him, yet among whom he was to make friends and foes and live out his life.

Some such thought came to Francis, and held his

fancy. It amused him to consider the old, retired shellbacks in their cottages as actors who, no longer active enough to take their parts in the great "doings" within, had been firmly but kindly pushed from the bright and animated rooms to the shadowy porch. It seemed to him that they always sat with a sidewise tilt of the head, listening. And he knew that it was for some echo of old things that they listened, rather than for any voice from the dusky future.

He became a regular visitor at two or three of the cottages, cheering the old sailors' hearts and freeing their tongues and memories with good liquor and tobacco, and listening to valiant tales of the sea for hours on end. Also, he paid visits to the harbour-side tavern whenever a seagoing craft of any kind was in; and there he listened to the talk of active, though humble, players of the great game who had, as it were, but stepped out to the porch for a mouthful of fresh air.

One bright, keen morning in December, John and Francis rode together to King's Haven. Relations between these two had been somewhat strained ever since the first word of the Bristol expedition. Sharp things had been said by both; but John had uncovered a mean stripe in his character that was harder to forget than any number of angry words. Heir to a

great estate, he had objected to the risking of a thousand pounds for the advancing of his brother's interests.

Of late he had begun to see what a poor figure he had cut in that affair. It required no great power of imagination to know what Francis felt about it; so, for the past fortnight, John had been working hard to reestablish himself in his brother's good opinion. It was slow work, however; for Francis, hurt and depressed to a greater extent than he himself knew, over the affair about which he must keep silence, made no effort to forget or forgive the injustice of this other matter. True, the money was to be risked; but John's fault was the same, for all that.

During the ride the talk was half-hearted and scanty. Upon reaching the top of the hill overlooking the harbour, the brothers saw a small brig lying at the wharf. The common-room of the tavern was crowded with sailors, longshoremen, and townsmen.

In the inner room, to which the gentlemen from Admiral's Pride were led, sat an old fellow with a head like a druid's, and a body like a cask. His frosted beard lay like a cascade on his breast, and his moustaches flared from his cheeks like wings. His face was brown, his eyes were small, and gray as ice. He was dressed in weather-beaten blue, with sea-boots reaching

half-way up his thighs. His right hand, clinched on the table beside his glass of hot rum, looked like the knob of some curious club.

"Good morning to you," said Francis pleasantly.

The old fellow stared offensively for a moment; then, without a word, he lifted the glass to his gusty moustache and drained it to the lump of sugar in the bottom. John flushed red with indignation.

Francis laughed good-naturedly.

"Your manners are not of the best, shipmaster," said he.

At that the mariner thumped on the table with his great fist and bellowed for the landlord to lay aft.

CHAPTER V

A STRANGE LETTER

MINE host opened the door and thrust his head cautiously around the edge of it.

"Brown," said Francis, "bring me a fair-sized bowl, a bottle of Barbados rum, a pint of French brandy, a pint of sherry, red bitters, two lemons, four limes, spice, sugar, and boiling water. I am going to try my hand at mixing a 'Billy-rough-un' punch."

"Steady there, cook! Bring me another of these here buckets o' honest Jamaica stuff," roared the mariner.

"But I want you to try my punch," said Francis.

"The deuce take your punch," replied the mariner.

John was for leaving the room; but Francis gave him to understand that there was sport afoot, and coaxed him into a chair beside the hearth. He drew his own chair up to the table.

"I see that you are a regular old heart of oak," he said.

The mariner glared like a wild beast at bay.

"I am proud to meet such an honest, outspoken, rough-weather lump of a son of Neptune," continued Francis. "It is men like you who strike fear into the hearts of the Frenchmen, for they are polite people. You have no more manners than a hog, sir. That's the kind I like, for rough and dangerous work. You smell of rum and bilge-water. You fear nobody. You are the kind of man I like to think of as continually risking a deep-sea grave."

John sat very quiet in his chair. The mariner stared at Francis with more of amazement and less of sulkiness on his bewhiskered face. He had never been talked to like that before. What was the youngster driving at? He was grinning in very friendly fashion, anyway. The old fellow grunted uncertainly.

"That's better," said Francis. "I knew the moment I laid eyes on you that you were a sociable fellow at heart. Sociable, but reserved. That's the kind for my fancy. I love these bluff, gruff, ill-mannered old dogs that suspect every one who speaks to them politely of designs on their throats and purses. They are the men who make England's strength."

"Be ye drunk?" asked the mariner, with a dawning light of interest in his eyes.

"Most assuredly not. Do I look it?" returned Francis gravely. That was a shot, right enough. He heard John chuckle.

"Oh, ye look right, aloft and alow! but ye may name me for a cobbler if ever I heard such fool talk afore in all my life," replied the other. He turned toward John. "Would ye say now that this young man be pokin' fun at me?" he asked.

Francis answered for himself.

"There was a deal of truth in what I said, and it was meant more seriously than it sounded," he said in a friendly voice and with an engaging smile.

"It sounded danged queer to me," grumbled the mariner.

"Well, however that may be, we'll shake hands on it," said Francis. Quick as the words, his hand was up in the air, close under the whiskers of the bewildered, sulky, half-awakened old salt. His bright, whimsical gaze shot a command into the depths of that clouded brain that could not be resisted. The old fellow glared and snorted with uncertainty for half a minute; then the big, gnarled, root-like paw opened, lifted from the table, and enclosed the hand of the young soldier.

At that moment Brown entered with the materials for the making of the punch. He gasped and gaped

at the picture made by Master Francis Drurie and the unsavoury mariner.

"Stir your stumps, cook!" growled the man of the sea.

The tavern-keeper recovered from his amazement and swiftly rid himself of his burden. He deposited bottles and bundles on the table, stood the kettle of boiling water on the hob, and finally placed a glass of rum and water at the mariner's elbow. It was a wonder how he had carried them all. The old fellow, instead of complimenting him on his dexterity, scowled furiously.

"Take it away," he shouted. "Can't ye see, ye fish-eyed son o' a swab, as how I be a goin' to join this gentleman in a glass o' decent licker?"

"But —" began Brown in a voice of righteous indignation. The mariner interrupted him with an oath and, snatching up the glass of rum and water with a swiftness of which one would not have thought the big fist capable, let it fly. Mr. Brown dodged. The glass and its contents splintered and splashed against the wall. Mr. Brown slipped from the room without excusing himself.

Neither of the gentlemen made any comment on this remarkable exhibition of table-manners. The throwing about of dishes, liquors, and glassware was not entirely unknown even in the best-regulated

households. But it seemed to be the last bubble of the old man's internal boiling. He leaned back in his chair and — *smiled!* Then, with eyes and ears alert and a benevolent relaxing of the jaws, he followed the mixing of the punch.

Francis made the punch, with constant hints from John. Neither was quite sure as to quantities, for Joskins had not yet taken them in hand; but, as they knew that they had not forgotten any of the materials, they hoped for the best. As the mixing progressed, the mariner's interest grew and grew.

"I never did see so many good lickers and fixin's go into one brew," said he.

Presently he began to sniff, and drew his chair closer to the bowl.

It was done. Three glasses were filled. Three glasses were raised and tasted. Never had a finer "Billy-rough-un" been brewed even by the hand of the ex-gunner's-mate. After the second round, John addressed himself to the shipmaster. He told him the history of the great punch.

The old fellow was impressed.

"An admiral," he said. "An admiral o' the navy. Well, I be danged! I were oncet in the navy meself — bosun's-mate. 'Twas in the navy I l'arned me manners. I's never forgot 'em, neither."

He told them many stories of his adventurous career, and all the details of his last voyage. His ship was the *Golden Crown*. He had sailed from London thirty-five days before. Yes, he had felt that it was his last voyage. The pumps had been kept working, day and night, from the tenth morning out until they got into the harbour.

The bowl was empty. As Francis shook hands with the master of the *Golden Crown*, he felt something like a folded paper pressed against his palm.

"Mum's the word, matey," whispered the salt, flashing his eyes at John's elegant back in the doorway. "Figger it out on the quiet. It be a letter for ye, matey, as sure as if your name was writ all over it."

Francis nodded and slipped the thing craftily into his pocket.

"How long will you lie in King's Haven? I want to have another talk with you before you sail away," he said.

"I'll lay here till I calk me seams and overhaul me tops and get a cargo — aye, and drink another o' them broadside punches," replied the mariner, smiling like the best-natured soul in the world.

The punch had thawed John as well as the ship-

master. He was not accustomed to potations of such length and strength so early in the morning. No sooner were the two gentlemen in the saddle than John said:

"Frank, you have a way with you, and no mistake. That old rogue was no better than a pirate when we first set eyes on him, but he was mild as new butter when we left. I could never have dealt so with the old rascal. He'd have cracked my head for me at the first word. When you are sailing the seas, you'll have to play such tricks every day. You'll find these old pitch-eaters brisk lads to keep in hand."

Francis laughed.

"Oh, with that punch, one could come around the devil himself!" he said.

John laughed as if a very good joke had been cracked. His usual deportment was uncommonly sedate for one of his age; but now he rode high in his stirrups, bumping and swaying, and beaming to right and left.

"You'll make a great sailor, Frank," he cried. "I envy you your career, rip me if I don't! A man can win a fine name at that sort of work — and a fortune too, like as not. It is not the highest type of mind maybe — this galloping, slashing, shooting, sailing type — but 'twill do, lad — 'twill do. And you come

honestly by it, Frank. There were a dozen of such among our ancestors. I am the first poet of the family. But it's little credit I get for that."

"But you say that Isobel likes your verses — so, why do you complain?" said Francis. You must not imagine from this that the punch had befuddled the soldier's wits at all.

"True — true," said John. "That is something, to to be sure. She has a very superior mind, has Isobel. She is a fine girl."

It came to Francis that he might just as well have the little pang over with now as later. He did not want people to think him a dog in the manger, as the saying is.

"Yes, she is a fine girl," he said. "If I were a poet, I'd put it stronger than that. And you are a lucky man, John."

He leaned sideways in his saddle and held out his hand to his brother. For the fraction of a second John looked surprised. Then, flushing a little, he extended his hand and pressed that of Francis swiftly and strongly.

John had accepted his congratulations! Well, there could be no question about it now. The most lively hope in the world could not keep a-wing against such odds. Francis's heart gave him a shrewd twinge,

and then felt as empty and insecure as a bubble. It was worse than he had expected.

For a mile or so they rode along without a word. John did not feel comfortable. He knew that he had no right to accept his brother's congratulations; for, though Mr. Dariza had made no objections to his suit, Isobel had rejected him twice. He told himself that he would not purposely have deceived his brother. He had been taken unawares. Frank had made his little speech, and stuck out his hand so suddenly that he had not had time to think. And the punch had flustered him a trifle. In fact, it was all Frank's fault — he had made the punch.

But what did it matter, anyway? Isobel was sure to say " Yes " before long. Oh, there was not a doubt of it! She had not been able to give any reason for rejecting him. For that matter, what possible reason could she give? In spite of her superior mind, she was full of childish whims. Feeling sure of him, it flattered her pride to refuse him. John was full of such convincing arguments like these — but, for all that, he did not feel quite at his ease.

The uncomfortable silence soon wore itself out, and for the remainder of the journey the two brothers talked together in friendly vein of all manner of unimportant things.

When Francis reached home and the quiet of his own room, he drew from his pocket the thing which the old shipmaster had pressed so secretly into his palm. What joke was the fellow trying to play on him? he wondered. Here was a sheet of paper, folded and refolded and sealed with red wax. The outside was black with grime. Across it was written, with a blunt quill: "In hand of Master Job Spark, of ye Golden Crown." Francis broke the wax and opened the sheet with infinite care. And this is what he read:

"FRANK: — If ever you come to Bristol, haste to the Cat and Rat. You will find the master a small man with a bald head and a purple mark on his left cheek. Gain his eye; then knock thrice on the table with the knuckles of your right hand and four times with the knuckles of your left. He will then come to you and whisper, 'Topsil.' You will reply, 'Tagantsil.'

"Whereupon he will lead you aside and give you full information of me; and if I happen to be in England, he will tell you where to find me. He is my friend. I have talked of you to him a hundred times. Tell my father that I am alive and prospering, but not a word of this to any one else. I am not in need of money, but I am in great need to see you. Master Spark,

who carries this, is a trusty man, but for fear that it may pass into the wrong hands, I must sign myself,

" BADGER."

Francis read the strange letter twice before any light came to him. His mind and heart were all too busy with his own affairs. It was the word " Badger " that cleared his brain. That was what he and Isobel had called Dick, years ago, and for no reason that he could remember. Beyond a doubt his correspondent was none other than the vanished Richard Fairwood St. George Dariza, late of the king's navy — and now of the Cat and Rat.

CHAPTER VI

THE BALL AT ADMIRAL'S PRIDE

FRANCIS DRURIE was haunted, night after night, by the strange letter from young Dariza. He could understand the cautious style of it, for he knew that the poor fellow was in hiding from the law, charged with the murder of a certain Captain Sir Howard Dilling. But what he was to gather from this rigmarole of knocks on the table and a friendly tavern-keeper with a bald head, he could not for the life of him think. In great need of something, but in no need of money. Now, what could he mean by that? Was he in danger of his life, from some other enemy than the law?

Before telling Mr. Dariza that he had received a message, he rode to King's Haven again. He found Job Spark in an agreeable mood. After ordering materials for the famous punch, they retired to the private parlour.

"Master Spark, I want you to tell me something about the man who sent that letter to me," said Francis.

"Put the question, Master Drurie, and maybe I'll answer ye," replied the mariner.

"Is he in trouble?"

This was evidently a hard shot for Master Spark. He pulled at his long moustaches, glared around the room, and wiped his brow with a huge mahogany hand.

"Well," he said, "ye might call it trouble — and, again, ye might not. He was safe enough when I left him."

"What work does he do? Is he following the sea?" asked Drurie.

"Aye, ye might call it that. He be's a fine sailor, be's Hodge."

"Hodge!" exclaimed the other unguardedly.

"Aye, that be your friend's name, I take it." The old man looked at the young man with a sort of taunting humour in his eyes.

Francis laughed. He read the old fellow like a book.

"You are sharp," he said. "But you are honest, and so am I. Hodge may be his name now; but, as you know as well as I do, he had another once. What that was I'll take it for granted that you know — and say no more about it."

Master Spark tried his best to look as if he knew

a great deal more than he really did, and to hide his curiosity. All this was plain as print to Francis.

Spark nodded his head sagely.

"It do beat all," he said. "How has the mighty fell from his seat, as the sayin' is."

"It was no fault of our friend's," said Drurie. "He acted just as you or I would have acted in the same place. He was insulted by a rascal, and gave him the lie fair in his teeth. So he was asked to fight. It was as honest a fight as two men ever engaged in — a doctor, and seconds, and everything shipshape. Our friend was the better shot of the two, but the other man belonged to a more powerful family. So the poor fellow had to run for it, and change his name, and hide like a dog. We have thought him dead until now. But all this, of course, is old history to you."

"Aye, ye might well say so," replied the mariner. But it was not. He had known that the lad called Hodge was a gentleman, but had never been able to learn anything of his past. The old sailor's heart was warmed by Drurie's trust.

By this time the punch was ready.

"What manner of place is this 'Cat and Rat'?" asked Drurie.

"A tricky place," said the mariner. "Not just the place for gentlemen with rings on their fingers to

fall asleep in. Aye, sir, ye may put it down as a chancey place — but don't ye name me for sayin' it. No harm in sayin' it, mind ye — but mum's the word, for all that."

"From this, I gather that our friend is in a rough and dangerous way of business," said Drurie inquiringly.

Spark leaned close to him.

"Ye have the right o' it," he whispered. "Rough and dangerous, ye may well say. If ye have any hold on him, sir, get him clear o' that crew. Not as how I mean to say any harm o' anybody — but a hint be as good as a handspike to a sharp one like ye."

Francis grasped his hand.

"Thank you for your frankness," he said. "Not a word of it shall go any further; but I shall not forget your hint or your kindness. I hope to make a voyage to Bristol in the spring."

Francis Drurie went over to Hopeland that evening, after his second talk with the master of the *Golden Crown*. He had avoided the place of late. He found Isobel alone in the hall, seated beside a fire of hickory logs. He looked at her chin, and then at the top of her head, when they shook hands. He would not allow himself the mournful pleasure of looking into her eyes. He was doing his best to forget about her eyes.

"You are ashamed of yourself — and well you need be," she said.

"Ashamed?" he repeated, honestly puzzled. His glance met hers.

"Why have you deserted us? It is five days since you were here," she said. Then she blushed suddenly and returned to her seat.

Francis felt that he was being made a fool of. She had counted the days since his last visit! What right had she to do that? And why did she blush? It did not look to him like a blush of guilt — which, of course, it should have been. What right had she to play with him after driving him away? He stared at her gravely until her eyelids drooped.

"You used to come to see me every day," she said gently.

"And now John comes every day. I thought that was enough," he said. There was a ring in his voice that he had not intended. She looked up quickly, and down again like a flash.

"You are rude," she said. "You must have lost your manners while fighting in the wilderness."

"I certainly lost something while I was away — something more important than my poor manners," replied Francis. Then, conscience-stricken at the speech — "I beg your pardon for speaking so," he said.

"What did you lose?" asked the girl without turning her head, and scarcely above a whisper.

The young man stared at her, astonished and angry. At that moment, to his great relief, Mr. Dariza entered the hall. He walked forward and met the old gentleman half-way.

"May I speak to you in private, sir?" he asked in a low voice.

Mr. Dariza glanced inquiringly in his daughter's direction, but she was gazing intently into the fire.

"Speak to me, Frank? Certainly, certainly. This way, if you please," he said in a very evident fluster.

Francis followed him to the library, puzzled at the uneasiness of his manner.

Mr. Dariza closed the library door, waved the visitor to a seat, and sank into one himself with the air of a man spent with exhaustion. A red spot flamed in the centre of each thin, yellow cheek, and his black eyes shone with a feverish brightness.

"You are ill, sir," cried Drurie anxiously, rising from his chair.

The master of Hopeland motioned him back.

"It is of the spirit, dear lad. Sit down, I beg of you," he said.

But Francis stepped closer.

"I have heard from overseas," he said. "I have

heard, in a roundabout way, that one whom we love — and thought lost — is alive and prospering." He talked very fast, anxious to tell all — all that he could tell — without startling Dariza. "He is not in need of money. He is in the city of Bristol, very comfortable, but still in hiding. He is known by an assumed name; but, beyond a doubt, that old trouble will soon be forgotten, and then he will come home and live fearlessly. But, until then, he cannot be too careful. He wants nobody but you and me to know that he still lives."

Dariza looked dazed.

"Of whom are you talking?" he cried. "Do you speak of my son — of Dick?" He sat straight in his chair, only to sink weakly back again. His frail body shook as if with the palsy.

"Yes, Dick is alive and well," replied Francis. Then, hastening from the room, he returned in a moment with a glass of brandy and water. Mr. Dariza swallowed a little of it, and then pushed the glass away from him. He pulled himself forward in his chair.

"How did the letter come to you?" he asked faintly.

"By the hand of an old shipmaster named Spark," replied Drurie.

"Show it to me," said the other. "Let me read it, lad, with my own eyes."

Now, Francis had guarded against this by making a copy of the letter, for his own use in the future, and burning the original. What the old gentleman would have thought of the mention of the low tavern and the purple-marked keeper, he dared not contemplate. That he would have suspected the worst, and suffered more than at news of the lad's death, there could be no doubt.

"I burned the letter, for fear that a servant might get hold of it," said Francis, lying coolly in a good cause. "It is so evident that Dick wants to keep his existence a close secret that I dared not take the slightest risk of having the letter go astray."

Mr. Dariza gazed at the young man for a long time; but, as the other returned the gaze without so much as the flicker of an eyelash, he said at last:

"I believe you did right, Frank — whatever it was you feared. Perhaps you burned the letter for Dick's sake, and, again, it may have been for my sake."

"I burned it for all our sakes," replied Francis. "It contained minute directions for finding him in Bristol; and if these were to fall into untrustworthy hands — or unfriendly hands — he would be in constant danger of his life."

Mr. Dariza nodded reflectively. He had completely regained his composure.

"But what of the fellow who brought the letter across the sea? Was there not great risk in that?" he asked.

"The seal was unbroken. Spark is a rough but trusty man, I take it," answered Francis.

"I must talk to him," said Dariza. "I want to hear, from one who has seen it with his own eyes, that my boy is alive and happy."

"I have talked twice with Spark," said young Drurie; "and, though I do not doubt his trustworthiness, I know that Dick has not taken him into his entire confidence concerning his past and his family. Spark knows that Dick is a gentleman, and the victim of injustice — but nothing more.

"Once he learned that Dick is your son, the whole story would be his for the asking. Any one in King's Haven, where his vessel is lying, would give him all the particulars. And who can say what he would tell in his cups? If Dick himself has not trusted him with the secret of his past, what right have we to do so? And I am positive that Dick has not. The fellow is even ignorant of the fact that he was once an officer on a king's ship."

"I believe you are right again, Frank," replied

Mr. Dariza. "But find out all you can, lad. I shall be at peace with this world I am leaving if only I can feel assured that the boy is not in suffering and has a chance of attaining happiness."

"I questioned the mariner," said Francis. "Dick is not suffering, I am sure; and his identity is well hidden. In his letter he says he is in need of nothing save the sight of an old friend's face. If he is still in England, I shall see him in the spring. Spark tells me that he follows the sea for a living, and is a splendid sailor. I gathered that he sails only on short voyages, in small, coastwise vessels."

Mr. Dariza got up slowly from his chair and unlocked a drawer in his desk. From this he took a purse, which he handed, without opening, to Francis. It was a large purse, of stout leather, and full and heavy.

"Here are a hundred sovereigns," he said. "Please give it to the shipmaster as if a gift from yourself, and tell him that half of it is for himself and half for Dick. Dick may not be in need of money; but I think a little extra is always welcome to a young man, whether he be an officer on a ship of war or a common sailor on board a coasting vessel."

He sank into his chair and covered his eyes with his hands.

Francis Drurie soon made another journey to King's Haven. When he gave the fat purse to Master Spark, with a brief word as to how the contents were to be divided, the old man's eyes glistened with the unmistakable sheen of greed.

He opened it and peeped within. He pulled out a golden coin and pinched it between his teeth.

"How d'ye know, mate, but what I'll keep the whole hundred yellow boys for meself?" he asked with a leer.

Francis smiled.

"You cannot frighten me," he said. "I know you as if I had lived with you all my life. You are far more likely to give our friend the whole purseful than keep it all to yourself."

Master Spark looked confused. He fortified himself with a glass of punch.

"Aye, mate, ye be in the right o' it there. Job Spark would never rob a friend, even if he hadn't a single flat un to buy his grog with."

The weeks wore along; and the *Golden Crown*, tight and sound aloft and alow, and freighted with corn and tobacco, sailed away from King's Haven. The months wore along; and early in March invitations went out for a great ball at Admiral's Pride. This was to be in honour of Francis, who had made his

plans to sail for Bristol some time about the middle of the month.

Since his visit to Hopeland to tell Mr. Dariza the news of his son, Francis had studiously avoided Isobel. He did not find this an easy thing to do. It went sorely against his inclination, and, which was worse, it caused comment on the part of Mr. Fairwood — open comment. But the poor lad could not trust his self-control. He knew that if the girl acted again as she had on that memorable day, he would cast to the winds all caution and the knowledge of the fact that she was betrothed to John. He saw his duty in the matter as plain as a pikestaff; and he would do it, though the heavens fell.

But Isobel's behaviour caused him days of worry. He could think of no reason for it — and yet he knew, in the depths of his heart, that she would not act so for idle amusement. His heart cherished her image and defended her; but his brain told him that she was a flirt. He listened to his brain during the hours of daylight and to his heart at night. He often felt very much inclined to kick Master John.

The ball was to be held on the sixteenth day of the month. On the morning of the tenth the brig *Thrush* arrived in King's Haven. This was the vessel in which Francis was to make the voyage to Bristol. She was a

full week earlier than expected; but, as the date of the ball could not be changed, her master grumblingly consented to wait until the seventeenth before heading eastward again. As soon as her cargo of mixed wares — silks, broadcloths, laces, firearms, wigs, small swords, and other fancy gear from England — was out of her hold, and the bales and hogsheads of tobacco under the hatches, Francis put his luggage aboard. He was keen to get to sea and begin his adventures. Amid dangers and new scenes he would forget his worries.

The night of the ball arrived. The Bullers came all the way from Indian Creek, the ladies in an ark-like, springless coach drawn by four horses, and the gentlemen mounted. The Sprigs came from Sprig Towers, twenty-six miles away. Sir Peter Nash, though little better than a confirmed invalid, arrived in good time, with only one foot in a stirrup, the other bandaged to such a size that it would not go in the iron. There were dozens of other fashionables, from near and far — the Fairfaxes, the Darlings, the Plums, and so on, and so on. There were old, middle-aged and young; red and sallow, ugly, ordinary and beautiful; clever, common-sensed and stupid. But of all that were beautiful, Isobel Dariza was the most beautiful.

Every room of the ground floor of the great house

hummed with the business of pleasure — the singing of the fiddles, the swish of gliding feet, the rippling of laughter, and the fine clash of silver and glass in the dining-room. About the kitchen and offices the negroes clustered. In the stables the horses of the guests munched contentedly.

Francis Drurie cautioned his heart not to be a fool, and asked Isobel Dariza to dance with him.

" You know that I cannot refuse you in your father's house," she said.

He had nothing to say to that. He had a right to this dance, and he would have it. He had so few rights that he was determined to make the most of them. To-morrow he would be on the sea. To-night he would snatch what pleasure he could out of a very sad affair. Suddenly, in the midst of all that stir and light and merriment, it was as if they were the only real people in the world. She was very close to him. She looked up, fairly into his eyes.

" Why have you deserted me? " she asked.

There was neither coquetry nor anger in her voice, nor any pretence of indifference.

" Because I cannot choose a middle course," he said quietly. He would tell the truth, since she had asked for it, and have done. " I must either love you or keep away from you. I am a poor hand at play-

acting. So, as you are to marry John, I have kept away from you. It has not been easy, I assure you."

"Why do you think I am to marry John?" she asked.

Her wonderful eyes were still raised to his, open and gleaming to their bright, dark depths.

"It was told to me; and John accepted my congratulations," he replied, his voice low-pitched and in splendid control.

"It is not true," she said with restraint that meant more than a passionate outbreak. "I shall never marry John. I have told him so many times."

"My faith!" exclaimed Francis softly.

Now they found themselves in a little room off the library, occupied by two old ladies and two old gentlemen, who were playing cards very intently. The only candles were on the centre of the card-table; the corners of the room were left in shadow.

"It may be," whispered Francis huskily, "that you — that you care a little for some one else."

He could not hear her reply. He leaned closer, so that he could see her face.

"I have loved you — more than life itself — ever since I came home from the West," he said.

Again, he could not hear her reply. Her face, though very near, was turned away.

"Isobel!" he whispered.

At that she turned to him, and he saw that her wonderful eyes were gleaming with tears.

What marvel was this! And the card-players still gazed at their cards!

"You must not cry," he said tenderly. "I did not mean to hurt you. I shall go away to-morrow — and never trouble you again."

"Don't you know?" she whispered. "Don't you see how I love you! I have loved you longer than you have loved me, dear."

He drew her to him, and touched his lips to her lips and eyes and brow. And the card-players did not look up from their cards!

CHAPTER VII

A BREAKFAST VISIT

THE last dance was finished. A few of the guests had departed, and the rest were asleep under the broad roof of Admiral's Pride. The lower rooms were in silence and darkness, but here and there a candle shone in the window of an upper chamber.

Francis had moved, for that night, to a little room in the attic. On the next night he would sleep still farther away from his accustomed bed; but he gave this no thought. He took off his laced coat and silken breeches and packed them in the leather bag, which were the only articles of his luggage not already aboard the *Thrush*. Then he dressed in a serviceable suit of blue. By this time the March dawn was blue against the window.

Francis extinguished the candle, and, his riding-boots in his hand, went silently from the room. He passed down the narrow, uncarpeted stairs on tip-toe.

At the closed door of John's room he paused for a

moment. "No. He is my brother. I will not quarrel with him," he muttered.

He descended to the lower floor, and let himself into the garden by a side-door. There were no leaves on the rose-bushes. The whole world was cloaked in cold, gray-blue shadows. The earth was soft and cold underfoot. Francis pulled on his boots and went over to the stables. A watch-dog got to its feet and barked. At the first sound of the familiar voice it lay down again, silenced.

One of the grooms on night duty opened a stable door and held a lantern over his head. In his other hand he grasped a stout whip.

"Barnaby," said Francis, "I want you to saddle Jumper for me as quietly as you can."

"Yesser. Yes, Master Frank," replied the groom.

When Jumper was led out, and Francis mounted, Barnaby said:

"The young lady was like a angel, Master Frank. All us black folks says so. An' all us black folks be infernal overjoyed to see that God has sent understandin' to ye, Master Frank. Even Barnaby seed what ye was blind to, sir. Yesser, I was near cryin', sometimes. An' her a angel, if there was ever one, an' not a lady in Virginny to name alongside her. Yesser."

"You are right, Barnaby," said Francis.

"Yesser. But why does ye sail to furren parts, sir?" returned the groom.

"I wonder the same thing. But it is my duty. She will not let me shirk my duty." He pressed a gold coin into the groom's hand. "You are a good boy, Barnaby. If ever you see the young lady in danger, try to help her. Your arm is stronger than many a gentleman's, lad.

"I'll be back in an hour or so," he said finally, and trotted away.

Francis Drurie cantered down the avenue and out to the highway. His brain worked intently, back and forth, back and forth, over the wonderful thing that had come to him, and over the bitter path to which duty pointed.

For the first time in his life he felt the cold agony of fear. It gripped him like the pain of a wound. He felt the ache of it in his heart and lungs. Through and through his fevered brain passed menacing shapes — shapes of dangers threatening the woman he loved. He gave no thought to the risks of the sea, but a vision of the gray distances that would lie between her and his protection weighted his spirit.

Yet she wanted him to go. She had made light of his fears. "Nothing will harm me," she had said. "I shall long for you, day and night, but that is the

part of a woman who loves a man worth loving. Though I fear that I shall not have strength to let you leave me a second time."

He brooded over the words that she had said to him a few hours ago, with her cheek against his shoulder. Surely, if fate held any danger for her, her heart would have warned her. He sent Jumper forward at a gallop. He outran fear.

What could hurt her in this peaceful place? Her father would protect her. Mr. Fairwood loved her as if she were his own daughter. Every man and woman, black and white, gentle and simple, on three estates, would defend her if any danger appeared. She possessed health, youth, and wealth. He had been a fool to worry.

And what was this voyage of his, when bravely considered? It would be a thing of the past in a year's time. She had lived eighteen years without an accident; then, why fear for her in the next twelve months?

He turned and galloped back along the way he had come. He passed the great gates of Admiral's Pride, and held on down the highway, riding at a clipping pace. Jumper needed no urging. But now the upper rim of the sun was just showing above the eastern horizon, and the world was all afire with azure and young gold. Up a gentle hill and down the other

side of it he rode, round a long curve and past the gates of Fairwood Manor. Half a mile beyond this he drew rein and dismounted.

Here was a humble gateway, the squat stone posts flanked by circular groves of yew. He opened the gate, led Jumper within, and hitched him under one of the trees of the grove. As he walked up the short avenue that led to the house of Hopeland his breath caught in his throat, and he could hear the drumming of eager blood in his head.

All was quiet about the house, though it was bathed in light from its foundations to its clustered chimneys. Francis moved to the middle of the lawn, turned and gazed up at a certain window. It was curtained and lifeless. Of course he had expected nothing else.

For all that, a sudden chill crossed his spirit. So he stood for several minutes, gazing helplessly and longingly up at the blind window. Suddenly his heart told him to turn before his ear gave him any warning, and turning, with open arms, he caught Isobel to his breast.

She wore a great, red cloak over her ballroom finery. Her firm, young arms were bare. He felt the cool, yet glowing, touch of them against his neck.

"Why are you standing here? What did you expect to see?" she asked presently.

"I did not want to sleep," he replied. "I rode until sunrise.

"Then I came here to look at your window."

"And I did not want to sleep," she said. "I have been wandering about the poor, leafless gardens since the first peep of dawn."

"I hope you have not caught cold," he whispered anxiously.

She laughed at that, but kissed him for it.

"Tell me, boy — tell me why you did not want to sleep," she murmured, nestling close to him, with her face against his shoulder, and one hand grasping the breast of his coat.

He was about to reply that his time in Virginia was far too short to throw away in sleep, but he would try to forget that for the moment.

"If I had slept I should have dreamed," he said; "and one cannot control one's dreams. So I stayed awake to think of you."

"And that is why I stayed awake, too," she said. "And I came out, that there should be only one wall, instead of two, between us. And think; there was no wall at all! We were both out in the gray dawn — and we did not know it."

"We know it now," replied Francis, and proved it.

They walked down the avenue to where Jumper stood patiently under a tree.

"Dear," said he, "I have been thinking hard this morning. If you want me to stay in Virginia, I will stay — aye, with delight."

"You must not say that," she replied, in a very small voice. "We must not think only of our happiness of to-day. This love of ours is for all our lifetime — and this first little year will be only a small part of that. I shall be brave, dear. When you return, dearest, how I shall cherish you!"

"God bless you," whispered Francis brokenly. He held her close. "Tell me — do you feel any fear of the future?" he asked.

"No," she replied. "I prayed this morning, and suddenly fear left me; and I knew that, though seas and lands separate us for a little while, we shall live our lives together. It was as if a voice had said it to my soul!"

The effect on the young soldier was instant and wonderful. Had an angel in celestial robes appeared before him and told him that his love was safe, his feeling of joy and security could have been no greater.

They walked back to the house, hand in hand. By this time the servants were moving about the house.

"Wait here on the gallery," said Isobel. "I will

slip in and up to my room. In ten minutes you must pound on the door, and say that you have come to breakfast. I shall be ready to entertain you until breakfast-time — and that is not for hours yet."

"And I must speak to your father," he said.

"Yes. Speak to him during breakfast. He loves you, dear." Then, quick as turning round, she was gone.

Francis stood very still for a minute. Then he began to contemplate the door, as if selecting a spot to hammer.

A boy came whistling around the hedge from the direction of the kitchen.

Francis halted him with a shout. "Come here, Sambo," he called.

"Lordamercy! Master Frank!" exclaimed the boy.

"You'll find Jumper hitched to a tree down by the big gates," said Francis. "Ride him home, and tell them that I am breakfasting with Mr. Dariza. Give the message to Barnaby to take up to the house."

"Yesser," said the astonished boy.

"Hold — here is a yellow one for you, Sambo," added the lover, tossing a thick coin on the lawn.

Then he turned and applied the butt of his whip to the door, with the air of one making up lost time.

The door was snatched open by Mr. Dariza's ancient black butler. His wrinkled face was quite gray with fright.

"Hi, Master Frank! Be some one dead over to Admiral's Pride?" he exclaimed.

"Why, no, Jake; I can't say there is," replied Francis, somewhat flustered. "I just came over to see — to see your master."

Jake bowed him in. He knew what a visit from a Drurie demanded, whatever the hour. Yet he shot a furtive glance at the young gentleman, suspecting that the refreshments at the ball had been too much for him.

Yes, he was right. Master Frank's eyes were shining in an unmistakable way, and his cheeks were flushed. He was about to usher his visitor into the library and go to the cook for advice, when down the stairs came the mistress of the house herself.

"Here am Master Frank, a makin' a call on the gin'ral," announced the butler.

He did not wait to see how his young mistress received the statement — or the caller — but retired to the dining-room, and congratulated himself on being very neatly out of an awkward corner.

The lovers greeted each other as if they had not already met.

When Mr. Dariza came down-stairs, two hours later, he tried to look as if he felt no surprise at finding Francis Drurie and his daughter calmly awaiting him in the breakfast-room. He greeted Drurie with quiet cordiality.

"Frank has come over to have breakfast with us," explained Isobel. "And that is very good of him; for this is his — his last day in Virginia for — some time." Her voice was a trifle uncertain.

Her father looked at her with tender inquiry. "Yes, it is good of him," he said. He smiled at Francis. "It is some time since you last honoured us, lad," he said. "I have wondered if anything serious could be the matter — if anything had injured our old friendship. I am glad to see that my fears were groundless. I consider it very kind and polite of you to spare us a part of your last morning at home." While he spoke, he kept his bright gaze on the young man's face.

Francis murmured a few vague words in reply. He knew that his cheeks were red as fire. He felt that Dariza could see his mind.

The breakfast-table was small and round. Francis found that without any effort he could touch Isobel's feet with one of his. The thrill he received upon making this discovery was wonderful, even without taking into consideration the thickness of his riding-

boot. Isobel did not draw her feet under her chair. In fact, she advanced them in his direction, at the same time opening her eyes at him in a way that seemed to dim the morning sunlight with a finer radiance. Lord, what things they are — love and youth!

Breakfast was half over by the time Francis had himself sufficiently in hand to make the first move on Mr. Dariza. The butler was out of the way. Now was his time.

"I wish to ask you, sir — that is, I want to know if you — " he began. He paused, staring at his host with a look of scared bewilderment on his face. The thing was more difficult than he had anticipated. Both his wit and his breath had failed him.

Mr. Dariza bowed gravely.

Encouraged, Francis began again: "I want your consent, sir, to — to — to ask Isobel to marry me."

Mr. Dariza smiled gently. "It would have been more correct, dear lad, to have asked me in private," he said.

"But my time is so short," replied Francis pleadingly. "I did not know until last night that I had any chance at all. I should have spoken to you then — but it quite slipped my mind, sir."

Mr. Dariza sat very still in his chair, gazing straight ahead of him with eyes that saw nothing of this world.

What they saw, who shall say? Perhaps a vision of his own youth; perhaps a face from beyond the veil of death. At last he turned to the lover.

" You may have her, lad," he said.

CHAPTER VIII

FRANCIS SAILS AWAY

Francis left Hopeland shortly after breakfast, having first arranged to meet Isobel down by the gates when on his way to King's Haven early in the afternoon.

He was received by the captain in the hall of Admiral's Pride.

"This is a strange way to treat us on your last morning ashore," said the war-scarred sailor.

Francis placed a hand on each of his father's shoulders.

"You will not say so when you know why I did it, sir," he said. "Isobel has promised to be my wife. I — I have so short a time to be with her, that I went over this morning. I hope you will forgive me, sir?"

"Forgive you?" cried the captain. "Bless your heart, what else can I do? Frank, you are a lucky dog. Gad, how you can sail away from that beauty is more than I can see. And what about John? Rip me, but this is a good joke on John!"

"I cannot help that, sir," replied Francis. "If John is hurt, it is his own fault. She did not care for him — though he led us to think otherwise."

Just then the mother appeared.

"Alice," cried the captain, "this young knave has as good an excuse as I ever heard for not staying at home for breakfast. What d'ye think? Stab me, if he isn't the accepted, and registered, and proclaimed future husband of the finest girl in Virginia! And I am glad of it. He deserves the best, though he does not happen to be our eldest."

Mrs. Drurie flung her arms around her son's neck. "But what is your father talking about?" she asked. "You must not excite him, dear, or he'll not be able to ride over to King's Haven."

Francis smiled at his father over his mother's head.

"Isobel has promised to marry me, mother, when I return from this voyage," he said.

"Isobel?" cried Mrs. Drurie. "Isobel Dariza? And what of poor John?"

"And what of him?" cried the captain, who was working himself into a fine fluster. He had not had so much excitement since his last battle. "And what of him?" he repeated. "Can't the girl pick her own husband — so long as Dariza does not object? Aye,

she can pick from all Virginia! And she has picked, old lady. She has chosen a fighter — a man who is already a good soldier, and will make a good sailor.

"That's as it should be. Sailors and soldiers get the finest girls — aye, and always will — I did, for one."

At that moment John came from the library, attracted by his father's tirade. The captain turned upon his eldest, and gazed at him from beneath puckered brows. The mother withdrew her arms from Frank's neck, and looked from one to the other of her children, as if she did not know what to do.

Francis walked up to his brother. "Shake hands, John," he said. "There has been a mistake — but I am willing to forget it. Shake hands, lad."

John complied with the other's request. But he looked puzzled and anxious. "What is all this about? Of what mistake do you speak?" he asked, glancing from Francis to his father and mother.

"You will understand, John, when I inform you that Isobel has promised to become my wife," replied Francis coldly.

The elder brother changed colour, muttered a few unintelligible words, and hurried from the hall.

With a snort of rage, the captain followed as fast as his lame leg would allow. Now he understood

what John's game had been; and disgust and anger glowed in him.

Mrs. Drurie turned to Francis with tears of fear and consternation in her eyes. "What is it?" she cried. "Why is your father so angry with John? He said nothing. He is to be pitied, poor boy."

"Yes, John is to be pitied," said Francis.

"Then why did your father look at him so — so frightfully?" asked the distressed woman. "And what was the mistake of which you spoke to John?"

"It is nothing to worry about — now," said Francis, patting his mother's hand. "John made a mistake, some time ago — and that led me to make a mistake. I discovered both mistakes last night; so no harm is done."

Mrs. Drurie was about to ask for a more definite answer to her question, when the front door opened, and Mr. Fairwood bounced into the hall. He grasped the young man's hand in both of his.

"Congratulations, my dear boy!" he cried. "'Tis the best thing I've heard in a lifetime. I've just been over to Hopeland, and the girl told it to me herself. She is the finest girl in the world, Frank — but, as she was bound to fall in love with some man, I am glad she has chosen you." He turned his broad and glowing face upon Mrs. Drurie. "She'll make a daughter for

you to be proud of, ma'am, though I say it, who am her uncle." He returned to Francis. "But why have you taken so long to find out what was the trouble with you? Was it your fault, or Isobel's? 'Pon my word, lad, it looked to me as if you were leaving the finest thing in the world to a young man who already has more than he deserves. And yet I knew all the time that it was you she cared for."

"I wish you had told me so," said Francis.

Just then the captain returned to the hall. The thunder had cleared from his brow — which was sure proof that he had rid himself of the lightning. He gripped his old friend's hand, and clapped him on the back. "You are in the nick of time, Henry," he exclaimed. "Joskins is mixing a Billy-rough-un."

John appeared just when the punch was ready. He looked pale and decidedly shamefaced. Yet he drank the healths of Isobel and his brother with a very good grace. Then, refilling his glass, he proposed fair winds and a safe return, and clinked his glass against his brother's.

Yes, Master John had made a noble recovery; but deep inside, he felt small and mean. Also, he thought his heart broken — but that, I am bound to confess, was only one of his poetic fancies.

It had been planned that Mrs. Drurie was to go to

King's Haven in the carriage, and that Mr. Fairwood and the three Druries were to ride. Now Mrs. Drurie suggested that she should call on the way for Isobel. She wanted to begin petting the girl immediately. She had a daughter at last.

"Perhaps she will not want to go," said the captain. "It would be a hard twist for her, beyond a doubt."

"Isobel is a girl with a fine spirit," replied the lady. "I know more of this sort of thing than you do, Paul. How many times did you sail away from me before you settled down to a peaceful life? And was there ever a time that I did not go aboard your ship, and remain aboard until the last boat pulled away for the shore?"

"You are right, Alice," admitted the captain. "Women are the very devil for wanting to see the last of everything. They worry more over little things that they don't see, than over big things that they have a square look at. Oh, I'm not denying the courage of the finer members of your sex, my dear."

"But I hope you'll not expect her to do anything that — that she may not want to do," ventured Francis, blushing very red.

The captain and Mr. Fairwood laughed uproariously at that.

"Have no fear, lad," the captain assured him.

"She shall be let do everything that she wants to do and nothing that she does not want to do, while you are away. Her word will be law with us, Frank, you may take my oath on that."

"You had better go over to Hopeland and ask her if she will accompany us into King's Haven," said the lady. "The carriage would call for her at three. Wait a moment, dear, and I'll send a note."

"And if your bag is packed, lad, you can stay there until we call for you," said the captain. "It seems to me you've cut your time so short that you'll need every minute of it."

What his mother wrote to Isobel, Francis did not know. It must have been something remarkable, to judge by the effect of it on the girl. She blushed and wept over it.

"I did not know she was so fond of me," she said to Francis.

"Everybody loves you," replied the young man. "But," he added, "if all their love was put together, it would not be equal to one-millionth part of my love alone."

"And just think, dear, that this time yesterday I cried for almost an hour because I thought that you did not love me at all," said the girl.

"How terrible!" exclaimed Francis.

Isobel decided to go to King's Haven, and a message was sent to Admiral's Pride by a servant.

Three o'clock, and the Drurie carriage and the riders arrived all too soon for the lovers. Every one but John kissed Isobel.

John was having trouble, at the time, with a horse that had never been known to give trouble before.

Then Isobel got into the carriage, the driver cracked his whip, the gentlemen swung to their saddles, and away they all started for King's Haven, leaving Mr. Dariza waving his hand from the wintry lawn.

Highways were poor affairs in those good old days, and carriages were not a bit better. If Mrs. Drurie and Isobel clung to each other frequently during the journey, it is not to be wondered at. The pitching, rolling, and bumping kept up their spirits. It was much more exciting than saddle-work. The carriage was wide, and the road was narrow; but Francis managed to keep Jumper close beside the open window at which Isobel's face appeared in every lull in the passage.

Sometimes the agile horse was in the ditch, and sometimes in the thicket of leafless blackberry vines beyond. Not once did he fall behind or forge ahead. A dozen times, or more, he was so close to the window that his rider was able to reach his hand within. It was an exciting and pleasurable journey.

The March sun was shining, and the March wind was piping over the little town and harbour of King's Haven. Gulls swerved along the skipping waves, and the air was wet and brisk with the smell of the salty flats and lively acres of the tide.

At the end of the wharf the *Thrush* strained secretly at her moorings, rubbing, pulling a little, and shifting this way and that, now fore and aft, now up and down, as if to discover the full strength of the ropes that held her. The wind piped in her tops and the tide fumbled at her keel.

The horses were stabled at the tavern, and the two ladies and four gentlemen went down the wharf and aboard the little *Thrush*. They were ushered into the tiny cabin by a dumfounded boatswain, and there the shipmaster opened a bottle of his best wine, and "a prosperous voyage" was drunk by every one.

Then the narrow, dark berth in which Francis was to sleep was inspected. Mrs. Drurie pronounced it unfit for anything but a cat, and the captain said it was a palace compared to his berth aboard the *Sneezer* when he was a midshipman. Isobel said nothing; but, the little coop being black as a chimney, she lifted her face to her lover's.

The brig swung away from the wharf, and little black eddies spun between the moving timbers and the

fixed. The headsails flapped and filled, and mariners went up the shrouds and out on the foot-ropes. The main sheet was manned, and the yard was squared to the time of a deep-sea chanty roared by husky throats.

Francis Drurie stood on the high poop, bare headed, facing the land from which he was so swiftly slipping away. The wharf was thronged with people.

In front, in a little space left for them by the townfolk, stood his mother and Isobel, his father, his brother, and Mr. Fairwood. He could see how straight the girl stood, gazing across the water to him, her right hand clasped in that of the elder woman and the left upon her lips.

Then, for a moment, the scene dimmed before the young man's straining eyes. A mist of tears welled across his vision. A great longing broke its bonds within him, gripping his heart and shaking him from head to heel. He stretched his arms toward the wharf, and a low, harsh cry escaped him. It was that sound that startled him to recovery.

When the entrance to the little harbour and the roofs of the town were hidden by the shifting coastline, and four miles of sea ran and splashed between the brig and Virginia, Francis Drurie turned and looked at the life that was going on so briskly and

heartily around him. All the sails were spread to the fair but gusty wind. The master stood beside him, gazing up at the swaying spars and straining canvas. Down in the waist, the mate walked fore and aft, now and then halting to roar a word of caution or command to the seamen who were busy at belaying or coiling down sheets and halyards.

"It looks as if we had made a fair start," remarked Francis.

"Aye, ye may well say it," replied the shipmaster. He stepped close to the passenger and stared at him with friendly eyes. "Sir," he said, "if I was a gentleman, an' loved by a young lady like the one that loves ye, I'd never set a foot on seagoin' timber. Not for all the gold in Spain, nor all the 'baccy in Virginia, I wouldn't."

"Gentle and simple, we have our work to do in the world," replied Francis. "It is our work that makes England's power."

The mariner smiled. "Aye, that be well enough for men like me, who have to earn our bread," he agreed. "But for gentry with grand houses, an' all the heart can desire, I see no manner o' sense in it."

"So you think I am a fool for my trouble?" inquired Francis.

"Aye, sir, meaning no disrespect," replied the other.

The gentleman smiled somewhat mournfully. "And what do you say to the voyage I am to sail on from Bristol — north and west to a place called Hudson's Bay?"

"I heard of it, ashore," said the mariner. "Them seas be the worst in the world. If the French an' the pirates don't get ye on the way, ye die with starvation when ye get there. It is madness, sir, to my way o' thinkin'."

"Then your way of thinking is a very poor way," said Francis shortly, and turned his shoulder on the discomfited shipmaster.

CHAPTER IX

AT THE CAT AND RAT

THE brig *Thrush* made her voyage across the Atlantic without accident. She weathered a half-gale or two, and received several frights from questionable-looking topsails — and once she frankly admitted fear, and crowded on canvas until the foam bubbled over the gilded fiddles under her forepeak.

There was no doubt that the vessel with the long topmasts and patched sails was following her at its best speed. But the brig was a swift little craft; and the excitement lasted only half a day. Perhaps it would not have lasted so long as that if the master had complied with his passenger's request to wait and engage the stranger.

Francis Drurie had found time heavy on his hands during the voyage, though he had applied himself to the studies of navigation, seamanship, and the French language. In spite of his work, he had never been entirely free from the sense of loss and longing that stirred, day and night, in his heart.

In Bristol, however, this pain was greatly eased. On solid land, among men and houses, the mind found relief from that constant sense of the vastness of space and separation from which there had been no escape on shipboard. Here were quiet folk living quiet, commonplace lives, even as the townspeople of King's Haven. One had only to forget the weary days of sailing, and Virginia did not seem so hopelessly far away, after all.

Francis had his numerous boxes and bags carted to a respectable tavern, situated at some distance from the waterfront. He summoned the innkeeper, and asked for the best room in the house. He was led to it in a twinkling, and his luggage followed close on his heels.

He had not brought his body-servant with him from Virginia, because of the lack of accommodations aboard the *Thrush;* but now he asked the innkeeper to find a suitable man to serve him until the sailing of the expedition. The fellow assured him that nothing could be easier, excused himself for a minute or two, and returned with a red-headed lad of about eighteen years of age.

" Captain, this is my son Nicholas. Ye'll find him honest an' willin', an' a wonder at lookin' after a gentleman," he said.

Francis made an elaborate toilet. Then, with his servant's assistance, he found his way to the counting-house of his father's agent. He cut such a fine figure that he was admitted to the merchant's private room without so much as being asked his name. Nick followed him, carrying a massive despatch-box. The merchant got to his feet, and bowed.

"What can I have the pleasure of doing for you, sir?" he inquired.

"My name is Francis Drurie," replied the colonial, "and I have this boxful of money to leave in your care for a short time, if you will be so obliging."

"Drurie? A Drurie of Virginia?" exclaimed the merchant.

"Yes. Here is a letter to you, from my father," replied Francis.

He produced the letter. The other broke the seal and read it.

Francis did not get away from the merry and prosperous Master Albert Smithers, shipping-agent, commission-merchant, and importer of corn and tobacco, until he had promised to sup with him that night. Returning to his inn, he again changed his clothes.

This time he put on a brown suit that had seen a good deal of wear, but was neat and respectable; riding-boots in place of buckled shoes, and a serviceable

hat, very modestly laced. Instead of his sword, he hung a pistol to his waist, well back under the skirt of his coat. Then, taking his cane in his hand, he told Nicholas to lead the way to the Cat and Rat.

Nicholas stared at him, open-mouthed.

"Well, what is the trouble?" asked Francis.

"Why, sir, it be a low, rough place, that Cat and Rat," said the young fellow. "An' no place for a gentleman like yer honour," he added.

"Nevertheless, I have business there," replied Francis. "If you do not want to accompany me, I shall have to find another servant. That would be a pity, for you seem an honest, capable fellow."

"I'll go with 'e, sir," cried Nick hastily.

They went down to the harbour-side, and along it for some distance. The way was full of interest for Francis Drurie. Here was the din of deep-sea business and adventure on either hand. On the one, the din of the loading and unloading ships, and on the other the din of the warehouses. With this lively human side to it, this business of seafaring seemed a very homely thing.

Here, all crowded together like sheep in a pen, were more ships than Francis had seen before in the whole course of his life. King's Haven was a toy harbour compared to this place. Strange men were

on every side, and strange voices shouted from the ships. There was a fellow as yellow as a lemon, with rings of extraordinary size in his ears, and no more clothing on him than shirt and trousers, in spite of the chill of the English air. Around his head he wore a bright red cloth, and he smoked tobacco twisted up in a little stick the size of one's finger.

Like a number of others on the docks and in the street, he seemed to have nothing to do but watch other people work. He was a big fellow, lean as a hound, but boned like a giant. As Francis and his man passed him, picking their way through a clutter of bales and puncheons, he stared at them with eyes as black and inscrutable as pools of pitch.

This touched the Virginian's anger. It smacked of insolence to him. Turning quickly, he met the fellow's glance.

"Well, my friend, is there something you wish to say to me?" he asked.

Nicholas pulled at his elbow, and in the second or two employed in shaking off the servant the yellow, pirate-like mariner vanished among the piles of cargo-stuff. The big man was gone, but so swiftly had he slipped away that a wisp of tobacco smoke still hung in the air where he had been.

Francis turned angrily upon his servant. "Why

did you take hold of my arm?" he asked, in a guarded voice. "Is that the way servants are taught to treat their masters in England?"

"I did it for your own good, sir," answered Nicholas boldly.

"You don't understand Bristol waterfront yet, sir, or ye'd never pay any attention to a fellow like that. He took to his heels. Well, sir, let us be thankful for that. If he hadn't he'd ha' ripped his knife into ye as quick as a wink."

"You may be right," said Francis. They moved on, both keeping a sharp watch on every side. "But what do you mean?" asked the master in a low voice. "What cause was there for him to stick a knife into me? Or to run away from me, for that matter? Who is the fellow?"

"I do not know who he be, nor what he be, but the first look at him told me that he was a dangerous man," replied Nicholas. "This crowd be full o' murderers an' pickpockets. Half o' them be no better nor pirates."

For a few minutes Francis followed the lad in silence. They turned up a narrow alley that twisted away from the wharves, beyond the fringe of warehouses, and lost itself in a place of toppling, decaying buildings.

"Are we near the tavern?" asked Francis. He whispered the simple question.

There was an air of ruin and hopelessness about the shabby houses and narrow footway that chilled his spirit and thrilled him with a vague but active apprehension.

In answer to the question Nicholas pointed to a weather-beaten signboard that swung creakily from a house about twenty paces away.

"There's the den," he said, turning a slow glance of anxious inquiry upon his master's face.

"Wait here," said Drurie. "Or, at least, somewhere within ear-shot of a call. If I do not appear in twenty minutes' time you may either go home or come and look for me."

"I will come an' look for ye, captain," said Nicholas.

Francis Drurie entered the low doorway of the Cat and Rat, and peered anxiously round the gloomy room in which he found himself.

It was a second or so before his eyes were sufficiently accustomed to the dusk to make out anything. Then he saw several small tables placed irregularly about the flagged floor, and six rough fellows drinking their liquor. The table closest to the door was unoccupied.

He moved over to it, seated himself on a stool, and

struck the table a brisk blow with the palm of his hand. Nothing happened. He looked keenly round for a sight of the tavern-keeper, and his eyes met the unwavering, black regard of the fellow of the lemon-yellow face and red-bound head.

He started imperceptibly, and his heart drummed in his breast, but he showed no sign of recognition or alarm. He let his glance pass easily from the yellow face; and there, in the back of the room, he saw a small man, with a bald head, watching him intently. There was a feeling of swiftly suspended conversation in the air of the room.

Very deliberately, Francis knocked three times on the table with the knuckles of his right hand, and four times with his left.

The change in the atmosphere of the room was startling in its suddenness, and yet wonderfully comforting. It was as if the air had cleared, quick as the turn of a hand, of some threatening storm. The five drinkers, who had sat like images, now raised their mugs and glasses to their lips. The big fellow of the yellow face shifted on his stool and puffed at his thin roll of tobacco leaves. The little man with the bald head came briskly forward from the back of the room and asked, loudly and heartily, what it was the gentleman's pleasure to drink.

Stepping close to Francis, and without waiting for an answer, he whispered, "Topsil," and shot a glance like a knife for sharpness into the young gentleman's face.

"Tagantsil," replied Francis, smiling.

"Rum, did ye say, cap'n?" asked the tavern-keeper.

"Aye, rum and limes," replied Drurie.

The fellow was back in a minute with the liquor. He served it untidily, but evidently as well as he could.

"If ye'd ask me to set down an' take a nip with ye, cap'n, then we could talk a bit," he whispered, rubbing the purple blotch on his cheek with a very dirty finger, and winking knowingly at his customer.

"Will you join me in a glass, innkeeper?" inquired the other clearly.

The fellow accepted the invitation with a polite but grotesque bow, and immediately drew up a stool and seated himself close to Drurie.

"Well, what news?" asked the gentleman.

"He be gone on a voyage," replied the innkeeper. "The king's men got too hot on his heels."

"For the old trouble?" asked Francis, eying the fellow sharply.

"Aye. What else?" replied the little man.

"Where has he sailed to?"

"Northward into Scotland."

"And when do you expect him back?"

"Not till the hounds that be after him forget a bit."

"And what of Master Job Spark, of the *Golden Crown?*" asked Francis, after a minute of reflection.

"Never heard o' the man," replied the other promptly.

Drurie saw that there was nothing more to be learned at present from mine host of the Cat and Rat. He paid his score, promised to call again in the course of a week or two, and stepped toward the door.

"Hold, cap'n, hold!" cried the innkeeper. "I have another word to say to you."

The young man halted and turned, his temper somewhat rubbed by the fellow's manner.

"Out with it," he said.

"Well, sir," said the innkeeper, "your friend, the gentleman what we was talkin' of, owed me a trifle o' money when he went away. He said as how ye'd give it to me, without a question, if ye got here afore he did."

This was such an apparent lie, and with such a low, beggarly motive, that Drurie's anger leaped red-hot within. Yet he controlled himself, and asked quietly the amount of the debt.

"Five yellow-boys, cap'n," replied the crafty fellow.

"If you can show me proof that my friend owes you this money — or ten times the amount — I'll pay it to you; but not a penny do you get from me otherwise," said Francis firmly.

A sneering, brutal smile twisted the tavern-keeper's face. He turned his head a little, so as to glance over his shoulder, and yet keep the tail of his eye on Francis.

"Come, lads," he said softly.

The six fellows sprang from their stools and rushed forward. Francis cleared his pistol, and presented it at the tavern-keeper's head. The little rogue dodged away behind the nearest table, pale as tallow.

Then the six hesitated, within leaping distance of their prey, and then a wonderful thing happened. The foremost ruffian had his arm up and back, ready to throw his knife, when, quick as light, the big fellow with the yellow face struck him in the side. The red blood hopped out. Without an instant's pause the big yellow fellow dashed his left fist into another's face, his knife into another's side, and kicked a third in the belly.

By this time Francis had turned his pistol about and cracked the head of the last of his opponents. The tavern-keeper crouched behind the table, all but fainting with terror.

The fellow with the yellow face tossed his knife away, grabbed young Drurie by the wrist, and bolted from the room.

Nicholas was waiting outside, with a rusty pistol in his hand and an expression of neck-or-nothing on his freckled face.

"Spare him — he is my servant," cried Francis to his rescuer; and to Nicholas, as he hurtled past, "Don't shoot! Follow us!"

Turning sharp to the right, they raced into an alley still narrower than the other, the amazing rescuer still gripping Drurie's wrist. About a hundred yards up, they came to a high, blind wall.

Here they halted. The big fellow released the other's wrist.

"You follow me, cap'n, an' me save you," he said. Then he laughed. "Me play fine trick on dem dirty robbers," he said.

Now Nicholas was up with them, his pistol still in readiness. Francis looked squarely into the glowing, black eyes of the man who had just saved his life.

"Why did you do it?" he asked.

"Me got good reason," replied the other, whose talk was as foreign as his eyes and complexion. "Me tell you why when we get more safe."

Francis grasped the fellow's hand, though it was wet with blood.

"You have done me a turn I'll never forget," he said earnestly.

The foreigner grinned and nodded his head violently. Then he backed away a few steps, ran forward, and sprang up the face of the wall. His big hands got a grip on the top, and in a moment he was up. Gripping a knee on each side, he leaned down with extended arms.

"Up you go," said Francis to Nicholas.

The lad jumped, and the man on the wall caught his wrists and drew him up beside him. Francis followed.

From the top of the wall they dropped into a small and untidy stable-yard, hemmed in by the back of a large, forsaken house and ramshackly sheds.

"You follow close," cautioned the man with the yellow face.

CHAPTER X

THE MAN WITH THE YELLOW FACE

THE three fugitives from the Cat and Rat entered the big house by way of a basement window. Then into a hole into the flagged floor hidden by all kinds of musty lumber dived the leader, followed close by the gentleman and his servant. Down they stumbled at a sharp incline, with blackness round them like a blanket, and raw earth under foot.

Francis held the back of the big fellow's sash, and Nicholas, in his turn, clung to the skirts of his master's coat. Francis had a small knife in his free hand. Nicholas still gripped his pistol.

The leader halted. "Me make a light," he said.

Click, click, chirped steel on flint. A spark jumped into being, and up sprang a tiny flame. Francis hid his knife in his breast. The big fellow fumbled about. In a second the gleam of a candle flared in the darkness.

They were in a tiny chamber walled by stone on two sides and on two by timber. In one corner was a

hearth. The earthen floor was partly covered with rugs. A number of sea-chests and canvas bags lay about, and on the walls hung a crucifix, a fine long sword in a scabbard of black-and-gold, and a formidable row of cutlases and pistols.

The man with the yellow face lit two more candles.

"You wait one minute," he said. "Pedro fix hisself quick."

First of all, he washed the blood from his hands and threw the discoloured water into the ashes on the hearth. Then he tore off his cotton shirt, disclosing a torso roped with long muscles and marked out in half a dozen places with puckered scars. He drew a shirt of fine silk from one of the boxes and donned it in a twinkling. He changed his ragged trousers for fine breeches, silk stockings, and high boots. From a tiny vial he rubbed something on his face and neck that changed his colour from that of a ripe lemon to that of an Arab. Then he powdered his hair and put on a fine blue coat.

"Me look quite like Spanish gentleman, name Cap'n Cremona, now," said Pedro, showing his white teeth in a grin.

Francis smiled and nodded; Nicholas only gaped.

Pedro belted the long sword to his side and clapped on his head a black hat heavily laced with gold. Then

he made up a bundle of the crucifix, a little bag of soft leather, two of the pistols, and a few shirts and stockings. He heaped the straw from the two couches against one of the wooden walls, tossed dry clothing around it, and took one of the candles in his hand.

"What do you mean to do?" asked Francis anxiously.

"Set fire," replied Pedro coolly. "Den nobody fin' dis place where Hodge an' Big Pedro hide so long."

"Hodge? What do you know of Hodge?" asked Francis excitedly.

"You know an' me know," he said. He leaned to the gentleman's ear and whispered: "Hodge! Bah! Him your frien' in Virgin — Richard Dariza. Dem fools don't know. Him my master — Richard Dariza."

"Were you his servant?" cried Francis, again grasping the fellow's hand.

"Yes. Me tell you soon," replied Pedro. He stooped and touched the flame of the candle to the straw.

"Stop. Half the city will burn," cried Francis.

Pedro shook his head. "No win'. Pretty safe. Just burn one or two house, me think," he replied. "Now you come quick," he added, pulling open a door in one of the wooden walls.

A few moments later the three stood in a quiet, narrow street.

Pedro pointed at Nicholas. "Him good, honest boy?" he asked.

"Yes, he is honest and trusty," replied Francis. He put his hand on the lad's shoulder. "Do you understand? Not a word of this to any one," he said. "We did not go to the Cat and Rat. We have never so much as heard the name of the place."

Nicholas looked terribly frightened. "Ye can trust me, sir," he stammered. "I be your trusty servant, sir."

"That good," said Pedro. He tapped his broad chest. "An' me Cap'n Drurie's frien', name Cap'n Cremona," he added.

"Remember that," said Francis to Nicholas.

They reached Drurie's respectable hotel in good order, though by this time a slim plume of black streamed to the sky from down harbour-way, and the clanging of bells and roar of voices came faintly to them on the spring air.

The two gentlemen walked arm-in-arm, and Nicholas at their heels with the bundle. They halted and turned at the doorway of the inn and gazed at the smoke in the sky.

"One big fire, I think," remarked Cremona, with dignified concern in his voice.

Captain Cremona, or Big Pedro, or whatever you want to call him, told Francis Drurie a story that explained his amazing behaviour.

Cremona had been born in England some forty years ago, of Portuguese parents. He had struggled through a rough and neglected childhood. He had been shipped to sea at the age of twelve, and for years had been treated worse than a dog.

After that he had sailed many voyages as an able seaman. For several years he had cruised in the West India islands. "Good money in dem waters," he explained, with a reminiscent smile. Later he had been impressed into the royal service; and it was during this period of his career that he had come to know and love Richard Dariza.

He was the young lieutenant's servant aboard the *Scorpion* for two years. Richard had always treated him kindly and had saved him from more than one flogging. They had been in tight corners together, risking their lives side by side. Then the trouble had come.

A senior officer, drunk, had insulted Dariza. Dariza had retorted by calling him a liar. A duel had followed, with fatal results to the senior officer. This man happened to be of a very powerful family; and so the young lieutenant, assisted by all the officers of his

own ship, vanished from the world that had known him.

His servant had vanished with him. The two had worked on the docks of many cities together as comrades, and had sailed several voyages in the same ships. They had made a living, and had done nothing worse than a trifle of smuggling.

Forced by fear of the law to avoid the honester houses of entertainment in Bristol, they had become connected with the questionable gang that frequented the Cat and Rat. The tavern-keeper, Mull by name, was a sharp-witted fellow, and had seen at a glance that Richard was no common sailor. He had begun immediately to show the young man a great deal of attention, and soon professed a warm regard for him. Richard had believed in the fellow's professions for some time.

Cremona never had, however. Richard had trusted Mull to a certain extent, but never so far as to tell him the true cause of his fall in the world, or anything definite of his old home, or the true relation existing between himself and Pedro.

In fact, the gang thought that they were but chance acquaintances of a voyage or two. Richard had asked Mull to find a trusty shipmaster, bound for Virginia, to carry a letter for him; and Mull had recommended

the master of the *Golden Crown*, who was not of the gang, but whom he knew slightly. Both Richard and Pedro had talked to the old mariner. He was honest, beyond a doubt. A fever had kept Richard in Bristol for more than a month, and Pedro had remained, too.

They had made themselves a hiding-place unknown even to Mull. Men had come for Richard to the Cat and Rat; but Mull had put them off with crafty lies. For this service Richard had paid him good money.

At least Mull had said the men had come. Pedro did not believe him. If it was true, Mull would have learned the fugitive's real name — a thing that had not happened. But at the time, Pedro had not reasoned so clearly.

Soon, Mull had more talk of officers of the law prowling about. Richard then slipped away on a small coasting schooner, leaving his faithful companion behind him. He himself had begun to distrust the sincerity of Mull's friendship. Pedro had remained in Bristol and in close touch with the Cat and Rat, on the chance that the master of the *Golden Crown* might return with an answer to the letter, or that Francis Drurie might answer it in person.

The possibility of his friend's arrival had troubled Richard greatly ever since he had begun to doubt

the honesty of Mull's intentions. And ever since Richard's departure Pedro had kept a bright eye on Master Mull. Yet not quite bright enough, for one day Mull had slipped six golden coins into his hand.

"'Tis your share o' a trifle we took last night," Mull had whispered. "Though ye were not on hand to help, ye be one o' the gang."

Then Pedro had heard how Master Job Spark had been robbed of one hundred pounds. So Pedro had kept a still sharper lookout after that, and at last had spotted Drurie and known him instantly for Richard's friend. He had hurried to the tavern so as to be on hand in case of need.

Francis Drurie could find no adequate expression for the admiration and gratitude that glowed within him toward Cremona. He shook the big fellow's hand. He clapped him on the back. He drank his health in the best wine in the house, and called him his very dear friend. He offered him half of everything he had and a berth as a gentleman adventurer to Hudson's Bay.

Cremona grinned expansively, swallowed the good wine in quantity, and stuck out his chest. "Me a gentleman," he said. "Well, that all right — me do right thing for frien's. Me don't want money. Me don't go to Hudson Bay with you — no, not now.

Some day — nex' voyage — yes. Now, Cap'n Cremona go look for his old master — his frien' — an' tell him how you come an' fine fight we make. When you get back from big voyage, we be here in dis same room."

"You are the trustiest heart in the world," cried Francis.

Nicholas was called up and told enough to set his mind at rest, but not enough to endanger any one should he prove less honest than he seemed.

A room near Drurie's was engaged for Cremona, for the big fellow had accepted the other's invitation to remain in Bristol as his guest for a few days. Then he would start north to find Richard, knowing in what ports to look for him.

Francis dressed again in his finest clothes. By now it was dusk, and Nicholas had lighted the candles. The landlord came to the door and said that a gentleman had called to see Captain Drurie.

Master Smithers was shown up. "I am a few minutes late," he said. "There is a fire down at the water-front, and I was a little anxious. But the warehouses are safe. It has been confined to four or five buildings that were worse than worthless, in that they sheltered some of the vilest characters of the city."

"I am glad to hear that you suffered no loss,"

replied Francis. Then he presented his friend Captain Cremona to Master Smithers.

They had up another bottle of wine.

"And how have you enjoyed your first six hours in Bristol?" asked Smithers.

"I have had a very pleasant and interesting time," replied Francis, smiling at Cremona.

Smithers turned to Cremona with a bow. "I trust you are free to join us at supper, captain," he said.

"Yes, me free. Thank you very large," replied the giant.

CHAPTER XI

IN WHICH A SPANISH GENTLEMAN ARRIVES IN VIRGINIA

For three days Cremona lived with Francis Drurie, and each day he rose higher in the Virginian's regard. Then he went away, cheerful and full of the great things they should do when next they met. He would take no money for either himself or Richard, but pressed upon Francis one of his fine pistols.

Francis heard or saw nothing more of the rascally Mull during his short stay in Bristol; but he avoided the harbourside, save when accompanied by a friend or two. He heard not so much as a word of the dead men in the Cat and Rat. They were fellows of no account, and perchance the authorities considered them better dead than alive. These were fine times for people with true friends and long knives — but not so fine for others.

Francis wrote five letters during his sojourn in Bristol; one to Isobel — which was not sealed and handed over to Master Smithers until the very day of

sailing on the great voyage — and the others to his father, his mother, Fairwood of Fairwood Manor, and Dariza of Hopeland.

As his days and evenings were fully occupied by work in connection with the expedition, and by social engagements with people interested in the Royal Company, in which he was now an officer, he was forced to toil at his letter-writing in the small hours of the morning, thereby winning a great reputation for scholarship in the eyes of his servant Nicholas. Having decided, after careful reflection, that there was no reason for keeping a knowledge of Richard's existence from Isobel, he told her that he had happened upon a man who had been Richard's servant, omitting the details of the meeting, had heard that Richard was safe and in good health, and hoped to discover him on his return from Hudson's Bay. To Mr. Dariza he treated the subject at greater length, though with no more particularity.

There were several great personages interested in the expedition, and by these young Drurie was treated with flattering consideration. The wealthy baronet who had known the captain in the old days had given Francis a great name as a soldier. More to the young man's taste than the great folk, however, were the gentlemen who, like himself, intended risking their

lives as well as their money in the expedition. There were a dozen of these in all, including himself and not counting the hired sailing-masters.

The daring little fleet consisted of four vessels. Drurie's was the *Brave Adventure*, a stout craft of something over one hundred and fifty tons, two-masted, square-rigged on the fore, and with boom and gaff-topsail on the main. In addition, she could spread three jibs, staysails between the fore and main, stunsails, and a little spinnaker.

Any one with half an eye for such things could see that she would be a sweet sailer. She was heavily ironed, as well as heavily canvased for her size. So quickly does pride in one's ship spring in the heart that Francis had not been aboard the *Brave Adventure* twice before he thought her the finest craft in the port of Bristol. On May Day, early in the morning, the little ships drifted out, one by one, amid the cheering of sailors and landsmen, the booming of cannon, and the flapping of flags.

Back in Virginia the humdrum round of quiet pleasures and mild excitements, such as hunting and dancing, was disturbed for our friends of the three plantations soon after Francis Drurie's departure. Early in April Mr. Dariza became, of a sudden,

flighty in his mind. His daughter and his body-servant were the first to notice it.

They did their best to keep knowledge of it from others, and were successful to a certain extent. The first hint received by Isobel and the servant of the unhinged condition of the old gentleman's mind was in this manner. Dariza called for the girl early one morning, before he was out of bed. Max was in the room, preparing the razor for his master's shave.

"When d'ye expect Dick?" asked the frail old gentleman.

"Dick?" cried the girl faintly, her face going white as paper.

"Aye, Dick. He wrote that he would soon be home and would stay with us for a month or two," replied her father.

Max let the razor fall to the floor.

Isobel went to the side of the bed and took her father's hands in hers. "I do not expect him before June," she said.

Dariza sank back on his pillow without a word. That morning he did not get up for breakfast. Later in the day he talked sanely and kindly to the girl about Francis Drurie. In the evening, however, after he had retired, he called his son's name three times.

A few days after that he complained of feeling too

tired to leave his bed. A doctor was brought from King's Haven — the best in the colony. He said that Mr. Dariza had a fever in his blood; so he drew off a considerable quantity of blood, and a deal of the fever with it, he said, mixed a bottle of evil-tasting doses, dined with Isobel, and jogged home in time for supper.

It was always in the early morning or at night that Dariza showed signs of a weakening mind. During the height of the day he talked sanely enough of things great and small. But the fever in his blood did not cool. He kept to his bed for more than a week after the doctor's visit — and then it was the most unexpected and amazing incident that got him out of it.

Isobel was in her room, kneeling at a window that faced the east — the same window at which Francis had gazed from the lawn on the magic morning. She was dreaming of that morning now, with tears in her eyes. A moment before she had been praying — a wordless, almost unconscious prayer — the petition of a frightened and longing heart for the safety of its mate.

Now peace was hers, as if her prayer had been answered. With the vague fear quiet, she called the image of her distant lover to her, across those tumbling wastes of sea, turned time back, and lived again that marvellous night and morning. She was disturbed by

the sound of trotting hoofs and rolling wheels. The dear visions drifted from her eyes. She stood up and looked indifferently from the window.

She saw a shabby, mud-bespattered carriage draw up beside the three stone steps at the foot of the terraced lawn. The horses, as well as the carriage, were unknown to her. Perhaps it was the doctor, travelling the muddy roads in a hired conveyance to save his own. She dried her eyes swiftly and ran down to the hall. The old butler and Max were already there, and the door was open.

Isobel and the two old servants stood on the gallery and looked out, at a loss to know what to do, disquieted and yet as inactive as if under a spell. They saw the driver descend from the box, open the carriage door, and pull from the interior two large boxes.

Then a tall gentleman in a long black cloak and wide black hat, stepped from the darkness into the failing sunshine.

He looked about him; and it was as if the group on the gallery felt the quick glance that they could not see. With a gesture of the hand toward the boxes, and a toss back of the cloak that brought to view a scarlet lining, he advanced deliberately on the house.

"Who *can* it be?" whispered Isobel, strangely agitated.

"Th' debbel hisself, I reckon," muttered the butler.

Now the stranger bowed and swooped his great hat from his head, disclosing to the fascinated regard of the group on the gallery a thin, dark face, eyes like black crystals, and an elaborate black wig.

The two old servants drew back, leaving their mistress alone at the top of the gallery steps. The stranger halted at the foot of the steps and again bowed impressively, hat in hand.

"Do you wish to see my father, sir?" asked Isobel falteringly.

"Ah, beyond a doubt. That is, if I have the honour to address the daughter of the Señor Ricardo Alcazardo da Riza," returned the gentleman, smiling a slow, wonderful smile that told of hope, joy, doubt, and courage. It was such a remarkable smile that the girl became more agitated than ever.

"Yes," she said, staring at the stranger with startled eyes.

He ascended the steps and stood beside her. "My name is Josef Alcazardo," he said tenderly. And then: "Lift a great care from my heart by telling me that your beloved father is in good health," he added softly, anxiously.

"You are a friend of his, perhaps? Please come in,

sir," said Isobel, with something of her usual composure.

"Yes," replied Josef Alcazardo. He followed the girl into the hall. His black eyes darted this way and that and seemed to penetrate into the surrounding rooms.

The girl beckoned to the old butler, who had retreated to the threshold of the dining-room door.

"Show this gentleman to the library," she said. She turned to Alcazardo and looked him fairly and searchingly in the face. He received the scrutiny with steady eyes and a pensive smile. "My father is not well. I will tell him that the Señor Josef Alcazardo is here."

The stranger looked as if he were about to speak — to offer some suggestion. The girl noticed this, and waited. "Yes, tell him so. Tell him I regret his illness — and that I long to clasp his hand," said Alcazardo haltingly.

Isobel hurried to her father's room and found Max already there. Dariza was sitting up in the bed, with an expression of keen anxiety on his haggard face.

"Who is it?" he asked. "Who has come to see me? Can it be some evil tidings of Dick — or of Frank Drurie?"

"I do not know. His name is Josef Alcazardo," replied the girl.

"Alcazardo! Heaven help me!" cried Dariza, with something of distress, but more of incredulity in his voice.

Isobel turned to Max. "Tell the gentleman to go away. Tell him that he cannot see the master," she said.

"No! Wait! Hold, fellow!" cried Dariza. "Tell him to come up, whoever he is. Ill or well, why should I fear Josef Alcazardo?"

The servant left the room.

Isobel took her father's hands in hers. "Is he an enemy — an old enemy?" she asked.

"What have I to do with enmity — or with fear?" returned the old man unsteadily. "My days are numbered; but, if need be, Ricardo da Riza can still strike. Leave the room, my dear, and let me speak alone to this belated visitor."

"I am afraid," whispered the girl.

Dariza pointed at a pistol that lay on the table close to his hand, between a glass of water and the bottle of doctor's stuff.

"You need not fear," he said significantly.

Isobel went into the passage. The stranger passed her with a bow, entered the bedroom and closed the

door behind him. The girl and Max stood close to the threshold, listening anxiously. The girl listened for the sound of a pistol-shot — the old servant for he knew not what. They could hear nothing.

So they waited for ten to fifteen minutes; then, unable to stand the suspense any longer, Isobel opened the door. She found her father sitting up and the stranger in an armchair pulled close to the bed. Alcazardo was leaning forward, his right hand clasped in that of Dariza. The invalid's cheeks were flushed and his eyes were shining.

The girl stood on the threshold, staring with open amazement at the friendly scene. Both men looked up.

"Come in, my dear," said her father. "Come here and welcome my long-estranged brother — your Uncle Josef — to Hopeland."

Isobel did not move, but continued to gaze at the two in anxious bewilderment. What did it mean? Had her poor father gone entirely mad? What wild talk was this of a brother from one who had turned his back on every member of his family or had their backs turned upon him, forty years ago?

"Come," said Dariza. "You must make your uncle welcome. He has put himself to a great deal of trouble and expense to find me. His heart is right. You have nothing to fear, Isobel."

Alcazardo arose from his chair and moved forward, smiling gently and affectionately, his hand extended. "Yes, you must welcome me, my dear little kinswoman," he said. "And as for fear — what have you to fear from your peaceful old Uncle Josef?"

The girl placed her hand in his, and he raised it gallantly to his lips.

"Now, that is better," he said. "We shall soon be fast friends, I see. And why not? I have come a long journey to find your dear father, that a mistake — an estrangement — of our youth might not go to our graves with us. Yes, I tremble at that thought. It was a mad thing — a blind, devilish thing — and the work of others. But let it die! Let it be forgotten, as it has been forgiven by both of us."

He patted the girl on the shoulder and smiled tenderly at the gentleman in the bed.

"Yes, let it be forgotten," said Dariza. "Thank Heaven you are here, Josef, and that we are brothers again. Thank Heaven you could explain the thing — and had the kind heart to travel all this way to do so." He lay back on his pillows, breathing quickly.

His brother was at his side in a moment, raising his head a little with one arm and holding the glass of water to his lips. At sight of that quick tenderness, the girl's heart thrust away all doubt and fear of him.

Dariza was better in a moment. It had been nothing but a little pain in the side. But Alcazardo would not let him sit up again.

"What was the dreadful misunderstanding?" asked Isobel.

"You could make nothing of it, even if we told you," said Alcazardo. "The events — yes, and the persons — who were at the bottom of it, are all dead now. It had to do with great people and small people, my dear little girl — even with a king, and armies, and all manner of uncomfortable things. But the king is dead, now, and the liars who made the trouble are dead — and here am I sitting by my brother's bed, very much at peace. So worry no more about the old mistake, my dear."

Señor Alcazardo seemed to act like a tonic on Mr. Dariza. Within an hour of his arrival, his brother was dressed and down-stairs. A servant was sent over to Fairwood Manor to invite Mr. Fairwood to supper. A stir of activity and curiosity went through the house and offices, and even back to the quarters of the field-hands, and the servants babbled excitedly over the sudden and unexpected appearance of a gentleman who was the master's brother, and the mistress's uncle, and yet whose name and of whose existence they had never before heard.

Mr. Fairwood came to supper. When he heard the remarkable news from his brother-in-law, he swore his astonishment and incredulity. When he was presented to the *señor*, he stared at him aghast.

Then he turned angrily upon Dariza. "See here, Dick, I'll be hanged if I like this!" he exclaimed.

"What is it that you don't like, my dear Henry," asked Dariza.

"Oh, of course it is correct and above-board, if you say so," replied Fairwood. "If you say he is your brother, why, he must be. But I've always been led to believe that they were all a bad lot; and I'll be hanged if I like to be forced into so sudden a friendship with a gentleman I don't know and don't like the looks of."

Mr. Dariza and Isobel were horrified by the other's frankness, and could not find a word to say or the courage to look at Alcazardo.

Alcazardo's reply, however, amazed them even more than Fairwood's attack.

"There can be no doubt of my kinship with your friend Richard," he said quietly, with sad eyes turned upon the bluff Virginian.

"But I do not blame you for feeling somewhat shaken and angered by this sudden call upon you to take an utter stranger — aye, and a foreigner — by the

hand," he continued. "You have heard evil things of this Spanish family. Well, sir, many of those things are true. Richard, noble soul, left his lands and his country rather than join in the evil. I was young then, and believed the lies that were told to me. But now I know my mistake, and Richard knows how it came about. I can only hope, sir, that you will soon understand me, and feel no longer any uneasiness about taking my hand."

Mr. Dariza was delighted and amazed at this speech. Forty years ago Josef had shown no signs of this Christian spirit. Far from it.

Mr. Fairwood did not seem to be so well pleased, though he was completely disarmed by the Spaniard's attitude. "Rip me, but you talk more like a saint than a don," he grumbled.

If any one had been watching Alcazardo at that moment, he would have seen a flicker of apprehension pass across the black eyes.

The supper passed off very well. Alcazardo told some capital stories, witty enough for Mr. Fairwood and delicate enough for Isobel. It was quite evident that, though a man of the world, he was possessed of a very tender heart. After supper he sang.

For Mr. Fairwood, he rendered an English hunting-song with such dash and vigour that the Virginian

forgot his distrust so far as to join in the chorus. For Isobel and his brother he sang a plaintive Spanish love song that touched them both to tears. Then he excused himself for a moment, left the room, and presently returned with a violin.

He was dressed in a wine-red coat and breeches, and a long waistcoat of white and gold. Instead of showing his own hair, he wore a fine black wig that reached to his shoulders. As he stood, tall and slender, with his back to the hearth and the candles on the chimney-piece, he looked handsome and sinister. He raised the violin to his breast and nestled his chin to it. The bow touched the strings inquiringly.

Then his right hand began to weave and lift, flicker and sink, about the dark and glowing instrument, and into the silent room flooded such a wonder of melody that Dariza forgot his sorrow and Isobel her longing, and the sturdy Fairwood sat back in his chair like a man in a trance.

Now, without a pause or break, the music changed in tone and rang louder. Then days of riding and fighting came back to Dariza, and Fairwood remembered the two years in which he had served as a cornet in an English cavalry regiment, and Isobel saw her lover adventuring on the sea, with his sword at his side,

and powder-smoke on the water, and the black ship of the enemy settling to leeward. It was the psalm of valour, by magic purged of fear and regret. And again the music changed.

Dariza covered his face with his thin hands. Fairwood puckered his brows, his heart turning through dusky ways after faces long forgotten.

And the girl remembered again the wastes of tumbling sea between this bright room and her young lover.

Next day, the gentlemen of Admiral's Pride came to Hopeland to pay their respects to Señor Alcazardo. They had already heard something about him from Henry Fairwood; and the only complimentary thing Fairwood had said was, " He plays the fiddle like the devil himself."

So they eyed the stranger keenly, even while they shook his hand. The captain wondered what the fellow was after. It was his opinion that a man who has let a mistake go uncorrected for a matter of forty years does not travel from Spain to Virginia, at last, for no more substantial reason than to set it right.

His first thought was that Alcazardo wanted money. No doubt the fellow had heard, in some roundabout way, that his estranged brother was very comfortably

situated. But the captain was not so crude in his methods as Mr. Fairwood. With a bland smile, and a question now and then, he went to work to discover the Spaniard's reason for visiting Virginia.

CHAPTER XII

ISOBEL SAILS AWAY

Captain Drurie learned, by his questions and observation, that Alcazardo was in no need of money. He was handsomely outfitted with both clothing and jewelry, and had a store of gold coins with which he was remarkably free.

He had crossed the sea without a servant. That seemed strange to every one. The Spaniard said very little about himself, and seemed to be one of the most modest of men; but, in the course of the first few days of his visit, he let people know that he was the owner of a house in Madrid, and of another in the country.

Questioned briefly by Dariza, he said that he held none of the old family possessions — that all those lands and houses had been squandered by the other brothers — but that his own little property represented a lifetime of activity in the service of his country. All of which sounded very fine — to everybody but Henry Fairwood.

He, doubting gentleman, did not believe a word of

it, and ignored the visitor completely and loftily except on such occasions as the violin was at work. One might continue to hate and distrust Alcazardo even when he was making music; but no one could ignore him then. He was a marvel with the fiddle — and even Mr. Fairwood had to admit it.

Isobel was attracted by her new uncle, although she could not bring herself to like his face. His eyes, at times, contained an inner, sinister light that chilled her to the heart in spite of her knowledge of his gentleness. That he was gentle there could be no doubt. The girl had seen him flinch at the sight of a driver lashing a stubborn horse.

He devoted himself to his brother's service, cheering him with entertaining conversation, reading aloud to him, and even watching beside his bed at night on more than one occasion.

His manner was forbearing with every one. Even to the servants he showed a consideration that was charming to see — in spite of which not one of them had a good word for him. Indeed, the old butler and Max hated and feared him to such an extent that their black faces faded to the hue of ashes whenever he looked at them.

Isobel admired him and believed in him, in spite of the sinister light she sometimes caught in his glance,

the whispering of the servants, and Uncle Henry's snorts of scorn. She felt that she and her father understood him and that the others did not. The captain and John were almost as suspicious of him as were Uncle Henry and the butler and the valet. But this, she said, was simply because they were men.

Men, no matter of what colour or class, always look askance at other men of a different kind than themselves, or of a kind to which they are not accustomed. Had Alcazardo been an Englishman, and skilled in fox-hunting instead of in violin-playing, and loud of voice instead of quiet, the foolish men would have accepted him with delight. She said that this was proved by the fact that Mrs. Drurie admired the *señor*.

To tell the truth, Isobel had, as far as she could see, very good reasons for holding Josef Alcazardo in high esteem. His attitude toward her was one of unfailing affection and consideration; and one day, finding her alone in the library, he had talked to her of Francis Drurie.

This alone would have been enough to win the girl's favour, for his talk had been so hopeful, so tender, and so congratulatory, that she had quite forgotten the sinister gleam in his eyes. He, who had never set eyes on Francis, had talked of him with understanding and admiration.

As for poor Mr. Dariza, he fairly doted on the Señor Josef Alcazardo. It was a wonder even to Isobel, to see and hear her father — for she could not forget the way he had first received the news of the Spaniard's arrival. Morning, noon, and night, he was ever eager to listen to Josef. Josef's presence in the house seemed to keep the good gentleman in a continual flutter of pleasurable excitement. Weak and worn as he was, he would not stay in his bed even long enough to have his breakfast there. No, he must be up and at his post, so as not to miss a word or gesture of the admirable Josef.

The thing was amazing and far from sane. The fact that the poor gentleman no longer asked about Dick was a sign that this absorption in Alcazardo was largely due to the flighty state of his mind. The flightiness had shifted, that was all.

Alcazardo saw and understood, and acted accordingly. He had suspected his brother's mental derangement in the first moment of their meeting. Now he was sure of it, and knew how to play upon the weakening heart and mind even as upon the slender strings and frail wood of his violin.

Though the girl was sane enough, he read her weakness, too. Her weakness was entirely of the heart — and in the wound he saw the image of a

certain young gentleman adventurer named Francis Drurie. So, to the girl, he often spoke of the brave young fellow who was, even now, facing peril on the deep for the sake of the woman he loved; but he always spoke hopefully, as if of every hundred men who went seafaring a hundred returned.

"I know the sea," he would say. "I have sailed many a voyage myself, here and there." And once, to cheer her out of an anxious mood, he bade her consider the master and the butler of Admiral's Pride. "They have weathered many a storm and many a battle," he said, "and yet the captain has suffered nothing worse than a bullet in the leg and the old gunner's-mate is as sound as a bell."

Is it to be wondered at that the girl grew to like and trust the man who was ever quick to read her fears and quiet them?

Mr. Dariza made a new will. His wife had left one concerning the property that had come from her side of the house and to which he had always refused to put forward any claim. In spite of his growing weakness this will he refused to tamper with. At the time of his marriage he had legally vested his wife with all the rights of what was known in those days as an "heiress," and, according to these rights, she had made her will.

She had left everything in trust to her two children, the father to have full control during his life, and, if he should die before either the boy or the girl was of age, the control of the lands and moneys was to pass into the hands of her brother, Henry Fairwood. This will had already been given to Mr. Fairwood by Mr. Dariza, a week before Alcazardo's arrival. But Richard Dariza was a man of considerable property in his own right.

Back of the tobacco-fields of Hopeland — Hopeland itself was already disposed of by the wife's will — he possessed many square miles of heavily timbered wilderness, some of which had been granted to him by the Crown and some purchased with his own money. Also, he owned a small fortune which was deposited with a London banking-house, and shares in several trading-ships. He had not left Spain empty-handed, in the days of his youth.

So Richard Dariza, gentleman, of Hopeland, Kings County, Virginia, made a new will. A lawyer came from King's Haven to draw it up; and it was witnessed by John Drurie, Josef Alcazardo, and the good doctor, who thought that nothing more was the matter with his patient than a " fever of the blood."

Richard Dariza died at nine o'clock of the evening of the tenth of June. He died in his library, in a chair

by the open window, with his daughter's hand in his and his brother talking gently of the little Spanish village, in the castle above which they had both been born.

Death came so softly, so swiftly, that Alcazardo went on with his story; but Isobel bent forward and peered into her father's face, startled by a sudden movement of the head against the back of the chair.

The girl's grief was intense. At first she could not believe that her father's spirit had slipped away, but knelt beside the chair, calling him again and again and clasping the cold and nerveless hands.

The old butler entered the room, carrying a branched candlestick with lighted candles in each hand.

Alcazardo went quickly forward, took the candles from him and placed them on the table.

"My worthy fellow," he said, very gently and with tears in his eyes, "your good master has passed away."

The old negro stared at him, far too greatly disturbed by his address to comprehend the meaning of the words. He trembled from head to foot, and shuffled backward a step or two.

"Your master is dead," said Alcazardo, a trifle louder than before and a shade less gently.

"God hab mercy! Lord hab mercy!" cried the

butler; and, turning, he ran from the library, filling the house with outcry like that of a stricken animal.

The other servants gathered to him. Their voices rang shrill through that house of death.

Alcazardo, cursing the blacks in his heart, went back to the chair where the girl still knelt by the dead man. He put his right arm about the girl's shoulders.

"Come, dear," he whispered. "Come away to your room. Be brave. You must not stay here, Isobel."

Without a word, she got slowly to her feet. His arm around her, holding her close and firm, he helped her from the room. They crossed the unlit hall slowly.

At the foot of the great stairs old Max, Dariza's body-servant, sprang up in front of them. He stood so for a moment, glaring close into the Spaniard's face; then he slunk back against the wall.

As they passed the old fellow, Alcazardo looked over his shoulder at him with that in his eyes that tore every fibre of courage in the African's heart. Isobel saw nothing of all this, for her face was hidden against her uncle's shoulder.

Alcazardo supported the girl to the door of her room. Then he went quietly to his brother's room, took the pistol from the table and slipped it into his pocket, and returned to the library.

Six of the servants — two women and four men — were in the library, squatting around the chair in which the dead gentleman sat as naturally as in life, but now heedless of their grief and devotion, and staring over their heads with blank eyes. They cried aloud — and their voices sounded less than human.

Alcazardo had heard this same bestial noise in the depths of tropical jungles. His gorge rose in his throat, and a hot devilish desire to spring upon these childish, foolish, primitive people and beat them until the blood should gush from their black hides shook him from head to foot.

Did he give way to this diabolical urging of the senses? No. Josef Alcazardo never lost control of himself unless he chose to. He paused on the threshold for a second or two, breathing quickly, his eyes on fire and his lean face horribly distorted. Then, calm and grave of face, with downcast eyes and reverent demeanour, he advanced into the room. Catching sight of him, the servants ceased their wailing and scrambled to their feet.

"You will try to be quiet, I am sure, for the sake of your poor young mistress," said Josef. "The sound of your grief disturbs her. Two of you must carry your master's body to his bed, and one go to Mr. Fairwood and to Admiral's Pride with the sad news."

No word was spoken in answer; but four of the blacks hurried from the room. The old butler and the old body-servant remained. Alcazardo stepped close to the nerveless, wide-eyed thing in the chair; and the two old men shrank away from him. Their fear of him was as clear as day — but he made no sign of noticing it. He bent above the body, tenderly closed the eyes and bandaged them with a silk handkerchief. He crossed the cold hands on the quiet breast.

Then, kneeling, he began to pray aloud in the Latin tongue. The prayers were what he could recall, at so short a notice, of a religious service which he had neglected for over forty years. But what matter their meaning so long as they were voiced in words unintelligible to his audience? He made the holy sign frequently. He bowed his head almost to the floor. Without a twinge of shame or fear, and for no other reason than to befool two old servants, he went through a travesty of religious devotion and pleading.

True, the prayers did not happen to be those for the dead; but what matter? They were, in fact, prayers of praise and thanksgiving; but the tone of grief in his voice, and the strange language in which they were spoken, hid their real nature completely.

At last he rose. One hand shading his eyes, he motioned with the other to the spellbound servants.

"Take the poor clay up-stairs," he said, in a voice that shook.

When Mr. Fairwood reached the house he flung open the front door and tramped violently into the library, heart and head full of a black suspicion of murder. He swore roundly at finding the room deserted. He dashed up the stairs and into Dariza's room, as if to question the poor body of the manner of its death. But he halted on the threshold, and all the red anger went out of his big face.

The body of his friend lay straight and slim in the middle of the great bed, covered to the breast with a long, black cloth. The hands were pointed upward in the dignified, conventional attitude of prayer. The face, no longer hidden by the bandage, wore an expression of calm severity that had been unknown to it in life. A candle burned at the head and the feet; and midway of the bed knelt Isobel with her back to the door and her face buried in the pall.

Mr. Fairwood had known that his friend was dead; but he had not realized it until now. Dead? Lord, he had spoken to the man about the need of a new fence between their pastures that very morning. And now look at him! God have mercy on us! A man is not sure of his next meal — or his next breath. Heavens, what a grim, strange look on his face! And what is

that against the wall, near the head of the bed? Is it death? No, it is nothing but a shadow. Lord, to think that poor old Dick is no more than clay, and his immortal soul off to God knows where!

Shaken as Mr. Fairwood was by the sight of the quiet dead — he had courage enough to face anything of living flesh and blood — he did not obey the promptings of his heart and hurry from the room. He would have done so, but for the sight of the desolate girl. As it was, he stood on the threshold for a long time muttering strange things to himself and trying to recover his nerve; then he moved forward, strongly but slowly, like a soldier marching through deep mud, straight up to the bed. With a choking sigh, he bumped down on his knees beside the girl and flung his arm around her. She nestled close to him. She had known who it was at the first sound of the heavy, honest footsteps.

The doctor came from King's Haven and announced that Dariza's death was due to the fever in his blood having suddenly ascended to his brain. This was reasonable enough, surely.

The funeral took place on the second day after the death. People came in from the surrounding country to attend it, a distance of fifteen or twenty miles in every direction. The gentlemen were not very cordial to Alcazardo, taking their cue from Mr. Fairwood

and the gentlemen of Admiral's Pride. The Spaniard was not one of them. There seemed something sinister in his arrival in Virginia so shortly previous to Dariza's death. They did not like his looks. In short, they could not stomach him, despite his polite and mournful manners.

When the contents of the late Richard Dariza's will became known, consternation reigned in Fairwood Manor and Admiral's Pride — more especially in Fairwood Manor. All Dariza's property was now his son's and his daughter's — his daughter's alone in the case that Richard was dead or could not be found — *and for two years every penny of it was in the hands of the Señor Josef Alcazardo.*

There was the rub! For these two years, according to the will, he was to act as the girl's guardian; but should Richard Fairwood St. George Dariza appear, the property was to be at once divided, and not only was the young man to have full control of his own share, but he was to share with his uncle in the management of the girl's, for the aforementioned term of two years, or for such fraction of that time as still remained after his appearance or discovery.

Again, if Isobel married Francis Drurie within two years of her father's death, she was to take control of her property immediately upon her marriage. This

sounded very fine; but, to tell the truth, there was not a word in the document to keep Alcazardo from disposing of every pound of money and acre of land within a week of the funeral. The game was in his hands, sure enough.

Mr. Henry Fairwood took the Señor Josef Alcazardo into the library, closed the doors and the windows, and went for him hot-tongued. He called him a great many things that are not fit to put down on paper — and yet he did not tell him more than half the truth. He called him a liar, a sneak, and a thief. Well, had he only known it, he might very properly have gone on to much worse. He shook his big fist under the eagle nose. He glared into the black, sinister eyes. He went on at such a rate that Alcazardo at last cried out, with a dramatic upfling of the right hand, that honour demanded a duel to the death.

Did he think to intimidate old Fairwood, I wonder? If so, there he made a grave mistake. Nothing would please the old man better than an excuse for attacking Alcazardo with pistol, sword, club, or empty hands. That was what he was working for and had been nursing in his mind for some time. If the other could be brought to a duel, it was even chances that he would kill the unprincipled adventurer. That would simplify everything. If, on the other hand, he should be so

unfortunate as to die himself, he would leave good men, such as Captain Drurie, behind him, and Isobel and her property would be in no more danger than now.

"A fight to the death!" he cried. "Thank God for the thought! Come, now, stop your cursed play-acting and arrange for the duel. To-night will do, and down in my woodlands is a pretty place. Drurie will support me and you can have young John. There'll be no need for a surgeon."

That changed Alcazardo's tune as quick as a flash. That was the last thing in the world that he wanted. With a bullet through him, where, then, would be his fine plans for the future? Oh, no, he had not the slightest intention of running the risk of being killed by that pig of a Virginian. That would be a poor reward for all these weeks of smirking and bowing and play-acting.

"You blind yourself to my position. You know that I cannot fight you, with this sacred charge left to me," he replied to Fairwood. "I spoke, a moment ago, in a fit of stupid temper. I cannot fight you."

Nothing that Fairwood could say or do could bring about a duel. He raged like a madman. At last he told Alcazardo to leave the house within the hour, bag and baggage, and never to set foot in it again on pain of being shot like a dangerous hound.

"You'll find that I am master of this house, by a will you could not change, you white-livered swine!" he roared.

Alcazardo set out for the inn at King's Haven before the hour was out; but ere he left, told Isobel his own little story. The honest, credulous girl looked upon him as a hero and a martyr. She felt that her father could have made no mistake in the character of his brother. Her own heart told her that he was to be trusted.

Immediately upon reaching King's Haven, Alcazardo wrote a long and wonderful letter to his ward, and posted it to her after nightfall, by one of the grooms at the inn. He explained the impossibility of his staying in Virginia, where he was so misunderstood. He could not leave her, however, for he loved her as he would a daughter of his own. Would she sail with him to England?

They would make every effort to discover Richard in case he still lived; and there they would welcome Francis Drurie on his return from the northern voyage. He weighed every word with devilish cunning; and not a word did he write against Mr. Fairwood or Captain Drurie. He said that they were slow to extend friendship to a man of a different blood — that was all.

Alcazardo worked in the dark. Men were paid to keep quiet about his moves. He seemed to have plenty of gold with which to buy silence; but you may be sure that he got his money's worth. He sold the woodlands behind the Dariza place, very secretly.

One fine morning in July Isobel drove to King's Haven. It was four o'clock when they left the house. The horses were put to their best speed throughout the journey. Alcazardo met her and they went immediately aboard the brig *Heron*. Within ten minutes of that the brig swung from the wharf; and she was hull down by the time Mr. Fairwood and Captain Drurie dashed through the town on sweating horses.

CHAPTER XIII

ISOBEL'S DISCOVERY

Long before England was reached by the brig *Heron*, Isobel Dariza was almost frantic with remorse for having left Virginia, and her old friends there, in so hasty and secret a manner. But she tried to hide her suffering from her uncle. He saw, at a glance, what the trouble was, however, and did his best to cheer her. In fact, throughout the entire voyage, he acted with the greatest kindness and consideration toward the grieving girl. His season of play-acting was not yet over; and he was not the man to spoil a good performance by haste or carelessness in the last act.

On reaching the port of London, Alcazardo took his ward to the best inn in the town, and lavished upon her all manner of gifts. He told her that this visit to London was purely for business purposes; that he wished to follow a certain clue that might lead to some information concerning Richard — this had no foundation whatever — and that he intended

looking into the state of the banking-house in which her money and her brother's had reposed for so many years. Whether the stay in London should be brief or long depended on the clue.

She was touchingly grateful for all the trouble he was taking for her. He spent a week in looking into the state of the banking-house, and his personal baggage was considerably increased in weight by the end of the week. As for the clue — why, it was really remarkable. It pointed to Spain, of all places. The last that had been seen of the person who might be the person they were looking for was aboard a ship called the *Five Brothers*, bound for some Spanish port. He was a born romancer, was Josef Alcazardo.

Isobel agreed with her uncle that the best thing to do was to go to Spain and follow the clue; and by autumn, whether successful or not, to return to England and wait in Bristol for Francis Drurie. During their brief stay in London, Isobel wrote several letters to Virginia — to her uncle, and to Captain and Mrs. Drurie.

These letters were sent across the ocean in sure hands and by the first opportunity, for Alcazardo was well aware that they contained nothing but good of himself. It tickled his queer sense of humour to picture the bewilderment of Fairwood and the Druries

upon reading that he was still the kindly, affectionate gentleman that he had pretended to be.

Alcazardo spoke, at first, of going to Madrid; but he changed his plans suddenly, for some reason unknown to Isobel. They travelled to Cadiz, by easy stages and in the most comfortable manner possible. They went directly to a large house outside the city. It was an old house, scantily furnished and pervaded with an atmosphere of emptiness and decay, as if it had been uninhabited and neglected for many years.

The only servant in the house, at the time of their arrival, was one old man. Alcazardo told the old fellow to engage immediately a cook and a young woman to wait upon his ward. The other shut one eye and screwed up his mouth at this, as if to say that it was not as easy as it sounded. The master drew him to one side by the front of his faded coat.

"Here is a little gift for you, my faithful Juan," he said, pressing a gold coin into the old fellow's palm. "The wages shall be large for the cook and the maid — yes, and the service easy," he continued. "See, here is something for each of them in advance." He put another coin into the ready palm. "Come now, Juan, do your best."

Juan nodded. "I know the very people for you, *señor*," he said. "My daughter for the cooking, and

her daughter to wait upon the beautiful young lady who is your niece."

So it happened that, at dusk of the day of their arrival at the desolate house, a well-cooked meal was served to them; and, later, when Isobel retired, she was attended by a dark maid named Maria, who not only unpacked her boxes for her and helped her prepare for sleep, but retired to a couch in the same room. The lonely girl was thankful, for the great bedchamber was not a cheerful place for a young lady to sleep in alone.

During the next week neither Josef Alcazardo nor his ward went any farther from the house than the stone wall that surrounded the tangled gardens and neglected orchard. Isobel was homesick, and the desolate house and grounds depressed her like a nightmare. She asked her uncle to take her to the city of Cadiz, if only for half a day, that she might rouse her spirits with sightseeing.

"Not now. But next week, perhaps, if I am not too busy," he replied. He did not speak as if he were sorry not to be able to oblige her.

She looked at him in frightened bewilderment. He met the glance coolly; then turned and left the room. But in a moment he was back again, for he had almost shown the cloven-hoof too soon.

"You must try to forgive me, my dear little daughter," he said contritely. "I am worried now. I have troubles. But in a few days things will be well with me again."

And so the sudden, vague terror that had stirred in her heart sank to rest — for a little while.

Only two visitors ever came to the house during Isobel's stay in it. The first was a short, black-bearded man of seafaring look, who came to see Alcazardo. He had been searching for him for several months, he said. He seemed in a very bad humour at the beginning of his first visit. He called twice — after dusk, and with only a day's interval.

Though Isobel did not see him on either occasion, he caught a glimpse of her. Such gentry have a way of seeing and not being seen.

Each call lasted several hours, during which time he and Alcazardo were closeted together in a small room on the ground floor.

The old servant — a sly old dog who wanted to increase his knowledge of his mysterious master's affairs — listened each night with his ear to the door. But he failed to hear anything more enlightening than a busy, senseless mumble of conversation, and once the jingle of shattered glass. The other visitor was a person of no importance in himself; but was to play

an important, though humble, part in Isobel's affairs, as you shall see.

When Maria brought up Isobel's breakfast on the morning after the black-bearded man's last visit, she brought also a note for her from her guardian. It was brief, but affectionate. This was the way of it:

"I have been called away, in haste, on urgent business. I hope to be back by nightfall; but if not, you shall hear from me. Be of good cheer.

"Your affectionate

"Uncle and Guardian."

This note filled the girl with wonder and apprehension. What was this urgent business of Alcazardo's, of which he had not told a word to her? And where had he gone to for its transaction? And why were his movements so sudden and secret? She sent for old Juan, and questioned him as to the time and manner of his master's departure.

The old fellow told all he knew gladly enough; but he knew very little. The *señor* had said nothing to him about going away; but he had been awakened, a little after midnight, by the sound of wheels on the cobbles of the yard. On looking from his window he had seen a chaise in the yard, with two horses in

the harness. A lantern wavered about, held by a peasant who stood at the horses' heads.

Then he had seen his master come from a small door that opened from the basement upon the yard. He was tugging a heavy bag in each hand. Having placed these inside the chaise, he went back to the house, reappearing in a minute with two more bags. With these he mounted into the chaise. Then the peasant got up in front, and they drove away.

Isobel's curiosity was excited. What was the reason of this midnight departure, made without the knowledge of herself or Juan? One would think that he would have awakened the old man, if only to carry the bags for him. And what could have been the contents of those heavy bags? She went to the door of her uncle's room. It was locked. She searched the house for keys, but could find nothing to serve her purpose.

A vague suspicion of Alcazardo was growing in her mind. It was more a suspicion of misfortune than of evil intention — a suspicion that worldly affairs were not in such prosperous condition as he had pretended. If this should prove to be the case, she was willing that he should use some of her money for his needs.

Sending for Juan again, she questioned him craftily, giving him the idea that she had expected this sudden departure of her uncle's, and was yet somewhat worried

about it. She hinted that it had something to do with a commercial venture — the freighting of a ship in which she and the *señor* were interested — undertaken against her saner judgment.

The old man was as simple as he considered himself deep. He was flattered by the young lady's confidences.

"That would be it," he said. "The seafaring man would certainly be the captain of the ship."

And so he went on, needing no questioning, and told what he knew of the man with the black beard. From that he wandered to other things, and let fall the fact that it was now almost four years since the *señor's* last visit. Yes, he owned the house. Yes, he believed he spent much of his time in Madrid; but he was not sure of that. No, the *señor* did not seem to have any friends in Cadiz. Oh, he was an uncertain gentleman, and a great spender of money. Of that Juan was sure, though he swore that he never saw much of it himself.

Isobel was thinking of retiring, and Maria was sewing busily by the light of their single candle, when Juan came rapping at the door.

He was greatly excited and had a letter in his hand for the young lady. He said that it had been brought by a rustic youth who even now waited in the yard with a large, covered carriage and two horses.

Isobel read the letter eagerly, and gave a little cry of delight. It was from Alcazardo.

He stated concisely that he had to sail for England in the morning; and that, unless she wanted to stay in Spain, she was to pack her most valued possessions immediately and accompany the bearer of the note.

Within half an hour of receiving the letter, Isobel and her maid were rolling along unknown roads in the great carriage. So they travelled all night; and at the lift of dawn the carriage came to a standstill before a dilapidated hut on the seacoast.

Here were Alcazardo and the man with the black beard, and four rough-cut mariners, impatiently awaiting their arrival. Alcazardo seemed very nervous, and was undoubtedly in a desperate hurry to get away from the coast of Spain. He all but dragged his ward and her maid from the carriage, and then snatched out their baggage and ordered the sailors to rush it down to the boat. He paid the driver of the carriage, and sent him about his business. He had not a decent word for any one, but continually urged haste, as if the devil himself were at his heels.

The boat down at the edge of the tide was already partially loaded. The work was completed in a very few minutes after the arrival of the carriage, and the boat crawled heavily seaward. Isobel and Maria sat

in the stern beside the man with the black beard, who held the tiller. The sailors bent to the oars, and Alcazardo reclined in the bow. Several miles to seaward the level sunlight flamed white on the sails of two vessels that stood off and on. Isobel noticed it and thought it beautiful — and then she leaned sideways a little and closed her eyes. She had not caught a minute's sleep during the night, and now her eyelids ached. The motion of the boat over the little waves was very soothing.

One of the vessels — the smaller of the two — veered in toward the boat. It was a fine little topsail-schooner, heavily sparred and with hull and canvas as white as shell. It lay-to and the boat ran alongside.

Alcazardo sprang to the deck. Isobel awoke, and she and Maria were passed skilfully up. The luggage followed them in short order. Then the boat pushed away from the side of the schooner and shaped her course for the other vessel, which lay within a half mile; and the schooner fell away before the wind.

It was then that Isobel discovered the loss of the little gold cross from her neck — the cross which her lover had given her. It must have broken from her neck in the boat while she slept. The chain was very thin — the gentleman with the beard had noticed that.

The little schooner danced along, with just what

wind she needed to keep the wrinkles out of her sails. So she danced all that golden day and all the silver night. Next morning Isobel asked her uncle how long it would be before they reached England. He looked at her with a smile on his lips and a horrid gleam in his eyes.

"My dear, foolish girl, we are not going to England," he said.

"Not going to England!" she repeated, with horror in her voice.

"We are bound for a snug little island in the West Indies," he replied with a leer. "An island where my whim is the only law, even as it is aboard this ship."

The girl uttered an inarticulate cry and sank to the deck.

CHAPTER XIV

FRANCIS DRURIE RETURNS TO BRISTOL

THE *Brave Adventure* outsailed the other ships of the fleet, and got back to Bristol in the first week of November. A crowd of townspeople of all classes and callings gathered on the water-front to see the little vessel furl and make fast after her daring voyage.

Here were shareholders of the Royal Company, anxious to see and hear how the expedition had fared; noblemen attracted by the romance of the voyage, and merchants attracted by other considerations; and all manner of idle folk, curious and looking for a little excitement.

Cheering thundered out from the crowd, and rang back heartily from the *Brave Adventure.* The gray sails dwindled and vanished, one by one. At last, drawing in with no more than steerageway, the stout little craft swung to starboard and settled in against her wharf. The cheering rose higher, and willing hands made her fast.

The commander of the *Brave Adventure* was the

first to step ashore, followed close by the master and the gentlemen of the ship. The important people clustered around them with expressions of welcome and good will and eager questions. "Where are the other ships?" "How fared the crew?" "What success?"

"Gentlemen," cried Drurie, "I thank you all, in the name of the ship's company, for your consideration. As far as we know, the other vessels are safe; but they do not sail fast enough to keep in sight of the *Brave Adventure*. We summered well, and made safe voyages both ways. We founded a strong fort, in the name of God and the king. We have a fine cargo of peltries under hatches."

Every one cheered violently at that — including those who had not heard a word of it.

Master Smithers grabbed Drurie by the elbow. "Come, captain," he cried heartily, "dinner awaits you in your own inn. I ordered it when you were first sighted."

"Have you seen anything of Cremona?" asked Drurie, after the greetings were over.

"Not a feather of him," replied the merchant. "But come along. The dinner waits. Make way for the commander of the *Brave Adventure*," he cried to the people in his path. "Make way for the gallant

adventurer who has not tasted English roast for six months."

"Give him his fill o' the best!" cried the crowd. "He is a fine lad. He is a great sailor. Way for Captain Drurie there! Way for the commander o' the *Brave Adventure!*"

So they made the slow but glorious journey up the wharf, with Nicholas at their heels, carrying a bag and looking twice as broad as when he sailed away with his Virginian master.

Smithers had a packet of letters for Francis; but he refused to give them to him until the dinner was over and several rounds of congratulations had been drunk. Then he left the commander to his mail and returned to the water-front to watch the unloading of the valuable cargo of the *Brave Adventure.*

First of all, Francis opened the letter addressed in Isobel's writing. It was in three parts; the first dated on the very day after his departure from Virginia, and added to time and again; the second, begun soon after the arrival at Hopeland of Josef Alcazardo, and full of appreciation of that gentleman's good qualities; and the third, written after Mr. Dariza's death.

It was not the news of the death of his old friend that shocked him most keenly in the last portion of the

letter, but the girl's anger against Mr. Fairwood and Captain Drurie for their treatment of her Spanish uncle. What could she say of the stranger's virtues to outweigh the fact that he had already caused trouble between herself and her loyal, old-time friends?

His heart was chilled with fear at the thought that a man whom the captain and Fairwood did not treat cordially had won the trust of the girl he loved. He felt sure that those two honest gentlemen were not likely to make any mistake in their reading of the stranger. They knew mankind and the world. They would never treat an honest man with anything but consideration and fairness.

With hands that trembled, Francis broke the seal of his father's letter. It was short and of fairly recent date — in fact, it had been written immediately after the arrival in Virginia of Isobel's letters from London.

The captain dealt briefly with the arrival of Alcazardo in Virginia, Dariza's death, and the remarkable will. Without comment, he mentioned the fact that Fairwood had done his best to incite Alcazardo to a duel, and that the fellow had accepted the gravest insults without responding. He wrote that Isobel, poor girl, had not understood Fairwood's good reason for his treatment of the other.

He skipped over the flight of Isobel and her guardian

with very few words; but he made the most of the letters which Isobel had sent back to Virginia from London.

"Who can say if the girl is right or we are right, after all?" he concluded. "Only Heaven knows what is in that black-eyed fellow's heart. He has begun well, as far as Isobel is concerned, at any rate; so let us hope that Henry Fairwood and I have been nothing but a pair of old fools in this matter."

Then, feeling a little easier in his mind, Francis read the communication from Mr. Fairwood. It was not comforting. The hot-headed old Virginian put down his opinion of Alcazardo in black and white. He drew his picture to a hair. He called him, to Francis, the same names that he had given him to his own face.

For an hour the young man sat in his chair by the table, with his face between his hands, trying to picture the last few months of Isobel's life. He derived no hope now from the fact that she had written home from London; for why had she not written to Bristol since then? Or, for that matter, if there had been any truth in Alcazardo's promises, why were they not both in Bristol at this moment? At last he rang for Nicholas and told him to search the town for news of a Señor Josef Alcazardo and his ward.

Francis left his chair by the table and paced feverishly

up and down the room, his hands gripped together behind him and his chin on his breast. The most unhappy imaginings filled his mind. Strive as he would, he could not accept Isobel's value of this man Alcazardo.

As far as London, evidently, the man had played his game; but after that, when there was no more need of playing, what had he done? Of course, he had possessed himself of the money. Curse the money! He was welcome to it. But what had he done with the girl — when no more was to be gained by pretending to be her guardian? Had he deserted her in London?

"I start for London to-morrow," he cried harshly in answer to the thought.

Had Francis known Alcazardo, that fear of physical desertion would not have troubled him. Alcazardo's devilment was of a more refined variety. He liked people to suffer under his eyes. He liked to contemplate the results of his work. He liked to play with his victims — to win their trust, then their hate and fear — to cast them to the depths, give them a glimpse of hope and cast them down again. But how was poor young Drurie to know that his sweetheart's uncle was such an original kind of devil?

He was still pacing back and forth, and dusk was

filling the room, when a knock came to the door. "Come in," he said, pausing by the window.

The door opened, and two men entered and stood without a word. Both wore long cloaks which reached almost to the floor; and in the dusk Francis could discern nothing of their faces. Their hats were still on their heads. Francis was sorry that he had not a lighted candle in the room.

"Well, what can I do for you?" he inquired steadily.

And still the cloaked men maintained their silence and their hats. Francis, worried almost to desperation by the news he had read in his letters, was in no mood to be tampered with by any two men in the world.

He stepped forward briskly, and with a swift stroke of the hand sent the hat of the taller of the two spinning to the floor.

"Off she go — my fine hat!" cried the voice of Cremona delightedly.

It was "Cap'n Cremona," beyond a doubt, though he had a pointed beard on his chin and his earrings were gone.

Francis turned to the other quick as the thought that had leaped into his brain, and grabbed him by the muffling cloak. It was Dick Dariza!

The friends embraced and shook hands, and em-

braced again. Then Drurie turned again to Cremona and grasped his hands. Then he pulled the bell and ordered candles and two bottles of the best wine in the cellar. He tried to throw off his anxiety for the time. He would not chill the satisfaction of the reunion by any mention just yet of his news or his fears. Neither could be done before morning, anyway.

During supper, and for an hour afterward, the conversation kept to the recent adventures of the three. Dick asked tenderly after his father and sister at the beginning of the meal; but Francis put off the hour which he dreaded by telling him that Isobel had promised to be his wife.

Dick rejoiced, and took it for granted that all was well with his family. He was something of a chatterer — and so was Cremona. Between them they informed Francis fully of all their adventures since the unfortunate duel. Many of these adventures had been matters of life or death, but they told them all lightheartedly.

They had suffered hunger and cold and humiliation; but there was no bitterness in their hearts. They had hidden from their enemies in mean places; but they had brought none of the meanness back to the open air with them. Their friendship was a fine thing. Dick treated Cremona, though he always called him Pedro

in private, with the same manner of comradeship as he treated Drurie; but in the eyes of Cremona, whenever they were turned on Dick, shone that light of homage that often glorifies the eyes of a good dog. For all that, his manner was now that of the loyal and somewhat boisterous friend; one could see by his eyes that he was still the loyal servant.

"We have been in the saddle all day," said Dick. "So now for bed — and in the morning — what?"

"There is an adventure awaiting both of you. I shall tell you the plans of it in the morning," replied Francis. He called the landlord and arranged about rooms for the newcomers. He handed his letters from Virginia to Dick. "I want you to take these to your room with you and read them before you go to sleep," he said. "They have but just come to my hand," he added.

Dick and Cremona retired, the table was cleared, and Francis again took up his pacing of the room. Back and forth he marched, as if on the narrow quarter-deck of the *Brave Adventure.*

It was not long before Nicholas rapped on the door and entered. "I have been to every inn of the city," he said, "and no sign has been seen of a gentleman by the name of Alcazardo."

"Very good, Nicholas. We start to-morrow morning for London," replied Francis.

"Yes, sir. Saddles or carriage?" asked the servant.

"Saddles," replied the commander. "Are there any horses in your father's stable?" he asked.

"Only the two belonging to Captain Cremona and his friend," said Nicholas.

"Then engage two more," said Francis. "We shall start at sunrise."

It was after midnight when Richard Dariza came quietly into his friend's room. Francis had been sitting motionless in his chair for over an hour, waiting. He sprang up and went forward to meet Dariza. The other's eyelids were red.

"It was quick — and easy," said Francis. "And now he is happy."

Dick nodded. "Yes — the poor old man," he murmured.

"As for Isobel — why, we must look for her," said Francis. "They have not been in Bristol, I think. So we shall go to London — to the inn at which they stayed and to the banking-house at which the money was. We should get some news of them there."

"I don't understand it," said Dick dully. "Why didn't Uncle Henry put a bullet through the rogue's head?"

"I would to Heaven he had!" cried Francis fervently.

In London they learned that the Señor Josef Alcazardo, uncle and guardian to Mistress Isobel Dariza, of Virginia, had removed funds to a very considerable amount from the banking-house of Smith & Wedder. The bankers had seen nothing of him after that.

At the inn from which Isobel had written her letters they learned that the Spanish gentleman and the beautiful young lady had left London in a ship. The gentleman had been very free with his money. The young lady was dressed like a princess. The landlord did not remember the name of the vessel on which they had sailed, but one of the servants remembered having heard Alcazardo mention Spain to the lady.

Nicholas was sent back to Bristol to look after his master's belongings and interests there. The other three, after a day's search, found a small vessel ready to sail southward. For a matter of four guineas from each of the gentlemen the master was willing to land them on the Spanish coast. They paid him half the money on the word, promised the balance when they should be safely landed, and went aboard.

The shipmaster protested. He did not intend to sail until a late hour of the next day. Why should the gentlemen not return to their inn for the night? But

the gentlemen were too old to be caught by any such trick as that. "I think this is your tide," said Drurie; and, sure enough, the little vessel was out in the stream within the hour.

The *Merry Andrew* was a lugger-rigged craft of about five tons burden. She had no deck amidships, but a tiny cabin aft and a still smaller one forward. Her crew consisted of two men besides Purl, the master. They were hard-looking customers, all three. Purl, when asked, said that the cargo was of spikes and other ironware; but, upon investigation on the part of Cremona, it was found to be of gunpowder.

Then the three gentlemen realized that they should have to keep a sharp lookout during the voyage, for they suspected that the *Merry Andrew* had a tryst to keep somewhere off the coast of France or Spain with some larger craft in need of ammunition.

Purl said that they were to occupy the after-cabin, as it was the larger of the two; but the passengers had no intention of giving the doubtful mariners any such advantage of position. With two men in front and another above and behind them at the tiller, they would be all but helpless in case of treachery. So Cremona, who took the lead in this matter to save the

others the trouble, said that he and his friends considered the forward accommodations the more comfortable.

"But we have our beds there already," said Purl.

"That is easily changed," replied Cremona with a smile, and pulled the straw beds and dirty blankets from the little den in the bows and tossed them aft.

By this time the *Merry Andrew* was out of the river. Purl swore savagely, and for a moment it looked as if he were about to spring upon Cremona. The other's alert and undismayed attitude, however, caused him to change his mind. "Have it your own way — an' to blazes with ye," he said.

As night approached, the kegs of powder, which stood close-racked on the ballast, were covered with tarpaulins. The evening was fine and clear, and not immoderately cold. The three passengers sat along the edge of the little forecastle deck, facing aft. Cremona rolled up a few leaves of tobacco and drew his flint and steel from his pocket. This did not escape the quick eye of Purl, who was at the tiller.

"Hold, there!" he shouted. "I'll have no sparks flyin' aboard this craft."

Cremona grinned and returned both tobacco and box

to his pocket. "I think you scared the cargo blow-up," he said.

Purl did not reply. A dangerous silence reigned fore and aft.

CHAPTER XV

THREE GENTLEMEN FOLLOW AN ELUSIVE QUEST

The three passengers were thankful that the crew of the lugger did not outnumber them. As it was, they felt but little anxiety. They had their baggage with them in the bows; and as soon as dark was fallen they lay down to rest, with their six feet pointing aft and their heads on their saddle-bags. A nudge of the elbow, a whisper or two, and the night's campaign was planned. It was Dick's first watch, Drurie's second, and Cremona's third.

Dick's two hours passed without incident. Then he pinched Francis, told him that Purl and his men were quiet, and instantly closed his eyes. Francis raised himself on his elbow, wriggled aft a little so as to have his feet well out of the open hatch and the waist of the vessel well under his eye, and composed himself to watch.

There was no moon, but the sky was generously powdered with stars. A four-knot breeze was holding steady over the taffrail. Save for the continual soft

washing and slopping of the water along the lugger's sides and under her forefoot, and the easy stir of spar and canvas, there was not a sound. Under the boom of the foresail the watcher could see the waist and rails of the little craft as far aft as the mainmast; but beyond that he could not see, for the main boom was lowered almost to the cargo. He wondered what the three fellows aft of the mainsail were doing.

Drurie had watched for an hour or more, when his vigilance was rewarded at last by the sight of a head under the boom of the mainsail. Shoulders followed, and in a moment a man was crawling forward over the tarpaulins, and a second was wriggling under the boom.

Drurie sat upright and advanced two pistols through the hatch. By this time the second man was on the cargo, and Purl himself was clawing his way beneath the boom. It was evident that the tiller was lashed.

"Belay that," commanded Drurie in a low voice. The two fellows who were clear of the boom lay still as death; but Master Purl, only half in sight, squirmed sideways a little and raised his right hand.

One of Drurie's pistols banged, and a scream of rage and pain rang high above the peaceful murmurings of wind and sea.

For a moment all was confusion — and then silence

again. The members of the crew and the wounded master lay in a row, bound hand and foot.

Drurie's bullet had passed through Purl's shoulder, clear of the bone. Drurie washed the wound and bandaged it with one of the fellow's own shirts, after which he took the tiller and advised his friends to return to their blankets.

The three passengers enjoyed the light work of sailing and steering the *Merry Andrew*. The wind held throughout the next day, and the lugger proved herself a fast and handy craft. Cremona cooked the meals in a charcoal stove which he had moved from the after-cabin to the forecastle deck. The messes which he managed to concoct from the rough and scanty stores tasted all the better for the risk of the cooking.

It was a thrilling sight to see Cremona at work with spoon and pan, Francis and Dick on guard along the forward edge of the tarpaulins, one of the crew clinging heedlessly to the tiller, pressed into service for the time, and the other two lying flat atop that orderly array of powder-kegs, their faces bloodless and their eyes fairly twirling with terror.

Of course there was little danger of a spark reaching the powder, for the gentlemen took every precaution against such a sudden and useless termination of

their careers; but Purl and his men suffered a foretaste of the torments of the inferno.

The day and the night were without accident or any incident to disturb the voyage; but on the morning of the third day out of London, while the *Merry Andrew* was bowling along within three or four miles of the coast, things began to brisk up a little.

The men aboard the lugger had been aware for some time of a large schooner off their port beam, about five miles to seaward, headed north under easy canvas. They paid little attention to her until, all of a sudden, they saw her long hull narrow to a speck on the glistening sea and her white sails climb aloft. She had swung at right angles to her course. She was heading landward now, with a fair wind, under all sail.

What did it mean? The passengers of the lugger could not say at first, and felt both puzzled and uneasy. They looked toward the land and saw neither town nor harbour — only desolate little coves, lilac-hued cliffs, and wooded hilltops behind.

"What d'ye make of it?" asked Francis.

Dick and Cremona shook their heads and gazed seaward again, and again shoreward. Cremona had a gleam of inner light.

"I think it may be so," he said, and stepped over to where Purl lay bound. "That your ship for this

powder," he said. "Well, what happen to us? We let you free, you say good word for us?"

The strain of watching the big fellow cook the meals so near the powder-casks had evidently dulled the dishonest mariner's mind.

"I'll let bygones be bygones," he said. "Cast off these lines an' I'll treat ye right."

"Thank you," replied Cremona with a bow. "That what I think. See, your friend fly signal."

Francis and Dick congratulated Cremona on his sharp wits.

"You are in command of this craft, so give us your orders," said Francis.

Cremona was delighted. He freed the least offensive of the lugger's crew. "You drop some kegs overboard," he said. Purl roared blood and thunder at that. "Very good," said Cremona. He cast Purl loose. "Now, you help," he said; "and you, Cap'n Drurie, stand ready with a pistol; and you, Master St. George" — the name they had decided to call Dick for the present — "stand by the sheets." He took the tiller and let the lugger's head fall off a point or to.

The tall schooner was tearing down upon them, swaying a little under her high, broad pinions. Two red flags flew at her tops — the prearranged signals,

no doubt, for the lugger to lay-to or sail to meet her.

The first keg of powder went over the *Merry Andrew's* rail with a great splash. Purl had intentionally tipped it over the windward side, in open sight of the schooner; and the commander of the schooner had seen it, and his suspicions of something wrong became a certainty.

Cremona only smiled, and again let the *Merry Andrew* fall away a little.

Overboard went the fat kegs — *splash-splash* — into the dancing waves. Another flag came into sight against the towering white of the schooner's sails. A great gun sent a dull boom of warning across the glittering sea.

"Bah!" exclaimed Cremona.

Purl swore lustily as he stooped to his work, and shot a desperate glance at Drurie and the pistol. Drurie and Dick laughed a little with the excitement of the game. They could see that Cremona was bound to play it for all it was worth — that he had no intention of showing his heels until he had to.

The tall schooner grew in their sight as if by magic, rolling her slender hull, sweeping her tops in free curves against the blue sky, heaping the silver foam like a snowdrift under her racing foot. A white cloud sprang out from under her jibs — and *thump* came the

report of her bow-chaser. A sharp little tongue of torn water leaped up and vanished on top of a wave midway the two vessels.

By this time the lugger was just light enough to sail at her best speed. Cremona held her on a gradual shoreward slant. Purl and the fellow who had been working on the cargo were bound again. Drurie manned the foresheet and Dick the main. Cremona stood on the tiny poop with the head of the tiller under his right arm, coolly puffing at a roll of tobacco-leaf.

The schooner closed in on them with amazing speed, firing from a gun in her bows as fast as it could be loaded and trained. At last a round-shot struck the water within twenty yards of the lugger. Cremona tossed his burning tobacco into the sea.

"Stand by to trim her!" he cried, and pulled her over fair before the piping breeze.

Francis and Dick hauled on the sheets and made fast, and the *Merry Andrew* raced shoreward as if her heart were in her heels.

The lugger was beached in a desolate little cove, on shelving rocks that split her stout timbers. The three travellers carried Purl and his two fellows ashore and placed them, still bound, beyond the reach of the water. Then they got their saddle-bags and started up the steep hillside that backed upon the cove. When

they were half-way up, the schooner's long-boat pulled into the cove, and musket-shots and shouts of rage filled the air. Bullets pattering on the rocks around them renewed the flagging energies of the three gentlemen. Each reflected as he scrambled aloft, dragging his heavy bag, on the various ways of dying offered by the world; and each disliked the thought of ending his career in this desolate cove. Death by a musket-ball is all very well; but no gentleman likes to be shot in the back while scrambling up a hill.

"We shaved it just about a minute too short," gasped Dick.

The long-boat was now in the still waters of the cove, and the rowers rested on their oars so as to give the marksmen a better chance at the fugitives on the hillside. Out rang another scattering volley.

Dick stumbled, and let his saddle-bag slip from his grasp. By now they were within a few yards of the brow of the hill. Dick got to his feet and fell again. A mocking shout came up from the boat. Cremona sprang to Dick's side and picked him up as if he were a child.

"Only in the leg," said Dick, smiling painfully.

Cremona dashed up and over the hilltop. Drurie recovered the discarded saddle-bag, and followed at his best speed.

Before them lay a bleak moor with timbered hills at the back of it, and the roofs of a village in the middle distance. They continued to run for several minutes over the rough hummocks of the moor, Francis keeping a sharp watch over his shoulder. Three or four of the boat's crew came to the top of the hill and stared after them with angry cries and furious gestures; but they did not offer to follow into the open.

"Easy," puffed Francis. "There is no need of running any farther, for they don't want to follow us to that village."

They walked forward for another hundred yards or so, and then halted on the top of a low mound and examined Dick's wound. The bullet, evidently a spent one, had entered the muscles of the thigh to a depth of an inch or two. They bound it; and Cremona again took Dick in his arms, and they proceeded.

"I should have got that ball in return for nicking Purl," said Francis.

"No, it was meant for me," replied Dick. "I stood over him and made him work at the cargo with his leg in a bandage."

"I think it should hit you in the same place, then, and that no hurt," said Cremona gravely.

By the fact that the men from the schooner had not followed them from the cove, they knew that the

schooner was not in an honest way of trade. She was a pirate, undoubtedly.

"I wish we had been aboard my own ship," said Francis. "I'd give a hundred pounds for a chance to burn powder with one of those gentry. Jove, I'd rather sink a pirate than a Frenchman, I do believe."

The others were of the same way of thinking. Little they knew that the future held a chance for them at that same tall schooner — and, had they known the result of that chance, they might have changed their wish.

At the village they found a quiet tavern, and a man who professed to a knowledge of surgery. Cremona, who could talk sailor's Spanish, explained their plight with an amazing story.

Then the surgeon extracted the bullet from Dick's thigh. It had not touched the bone; and they were thankful for that. Dick was put to bed, faint from loss of blood and the pain of the operation. Francis sat by his side while Cremona went down-stairs and questioned the tavern-keeper. He learned that they were within thirty miles of Lisbon, in Portugal.

Dick's wound kept the three in that insignificant village for three weary weeks. As soon as he was fit to move, they went to Lisbon by carriage; and from there they travelled into Spain, and to the gay city of Madrid.

Dick was not yet able to walk; so he kept to his room while Francis and Cremona hunted through the city for information concerning the Señor Josef Alcazardo. They learned all that Madrid had to teach them on that subject within six hours of their arrival. This was the way of it:

They were walking along a fine street, dressed as well as their limited wardrobes would allow, and puzzled as to how and of whom to make inquiries, when a very gaily attired old gentleman dropped his snuff-box almost under Drurie's feet. He uttered a shrill little cry of distress; for it was a valuable old box.

Quick as a wink, a ragged fellow in the crowd had snatched up the box and started to run — and, even quicker than winking, Francis had him by the collar. He pulled the box from his hand, let him go, turned to the old gentleman with a bow and restored his treasure to him.

The old gentleman was almost moved to tears with gratitude. He embraced both Francis and Cremona, and babbled his thanks.

"My friend does not understand the beautiful Spanish language," said Cremona, "but I can assure you, *señor*, that he is glad to have been able to serve you."

The old gentleman told Cremona his name. As it was nine words long, and has nothing to do with our story, I will not record it.

Cremona bowed in his best style; and Francis bowed. "We are English gentlemen," said Cremona. "My friend is the Captain Francis Drurie, and I am the Captain Cremona — your humble servants, *señor*."

"You must honour me with your company over a bottle of wine. We can get very good wine just across the square," said the Spaniard.

After they had raised their glasses to their mutual well-being, Cremona asked: "Can you tell me anything of the Señor Josef Alcazardo?"

The old gentleman looked at them both very sharply. "Yes, sir," he replied, "I can tell you that he is a rascal and a cheat."

"We have suspected as much; but can you tell us where he is to be found?" returned Cremona.

"That I cannot," answered the old gentleman. "To my knowledge, he has not been seen in Madrid for the last six years. I trust — I trust, gentlemen, that you are not friends of his."

"Far from it."

"Ah! I ask no questions."

Cremona, knowing what that meant, satisfied the old gentleman's curiosity with a cock-and-bull story.

In return, the amiable Spaniard narrated a number of unsavoury incidents of Alcazardo's career in Madrid. They were not criminal, however, and most had to do with cheating at play and such ill-bred peculiarities.

CHAPTER XVI

SOMETHING HEARD OF ALCAZARDO

Francis and Dick were at a complete loss to know where they could search next. They had expected great things of Madrid.

Cremona came to their help by suggesting Cadiz, a port he had visited several times in his voyagings as a common sailor. He held that a man with a bad name is more likely to be found on or near the sea than in an inland district. His way of escape is always ready to his hand; and, the seas being the great highways of the world, he can watch for his enemies and, if need be, sail out as they sail in.

"But we, you understand, come at him from the inside. He look out his window at the ships — we walk in his back door," he concluded.

Dick's opinion was that, if he were hiding anywhere in Spain, it would prove to be in some rural locality, away from the gossip and traffic of the cities.

Francis was also of this way of thinking; but he agreed with Cremona that the retreat was more likely

to be near the coast than inland. So they decided to go to Cadiz.

It was a long journey and a dangerous one, from Madrid to Cadiz. For the sake of Dick's leg, it was made in short stages, now in a carriage, now in a country cart, again astride horses, mules, or even donkeys. Sometimes they hired five or six villagers to accompany them through the districts frequented by robbers, threw out scouts and flanking parties, and advanced in the best military manner. Upon reaching Cadiz they went to a quiet house and informed the landlord that they were English merchants interested in Spanish wines.

"We once purchased a shipment from a Señor Josef Alcazardo," said Cremona. "It was good wine. Can you tell me where the gentleman is now to be found?"

The innkeeper said that he knew nothing of the Señor Alcazardo, but that he would make inquiries among his patrons. Cremona expressed his gratitude, and proved it with a silver coin; then, leaving Dick to look after his leg and the bags, the others hired horses and rode out of the city to take a look at the surrounding country. They were cautious in the manner of making their inquiries, fearing that their quarry might get wind of them and take fright. It was always

Cremona who did the talking. He had a way of stopping people on the road with a polite and friendly salutation. "This is a fine piece of country," he would say. He would ask about last season's crops, and so on; and then, casually, "I once met a gentleman named Josef Alcazardo, who was from hereabouts," he would say. "Perhaps you know him?" They spent a day at this sort of thing without results.

On the evening of their first day in Cadiz, the innkeeper came to the three travellers with word that there was an old fellow below who wanted to speak with them.

"He will not say if he knows anything or not of the Señor Alcazardo, but he is anxious to speak with the gentlemen who are looking for the *señor*," said the innkeeper.

"Show him up," said Cremona.

It was old Juan who entered the room, cap in hand, his thin cheeks slightly flushed by the wine he had imbibed below. He had guessed, at the first mention of the three English merchants interested in wine, who wanted to know the whereabouts of his master, that their visit to Cadiz had to do with the beautiful young lady. He was not so anxious to answer questions as to ask them. Belonging to a district in which the family of Alcazardo was unknown, and never having

heard of the marriage of one of his master's brothers with an English lady, the beautiful ward had puzzled him sorely.

Cremona measured the old man at a glance. He waved him to a seat, and handed him a glass of wine that was very superior to the vintage which the fellow had been drinking in the public room below.

"Can you tell me anything of the Señor Josef Alcazardo?" he asked, in his fluent but uncouth Spanish.

Juan looked exceedingly crafty. "That's as may be, *señor*. What do you want to know of my master?"

"Ho, ho! So he is your master, is he?" cried Cremona.

The old fellow's jaw dropped dismally. He had not meant to let that pop out so soon. He had meant to draw pay for that bit of information. Cremona saw his dismay and chagrin, and laughed boisterously. Dick, who had learned a little Spanish in his childhood, laughed, too, and told the good news and the joke to Francis.

Hope sprang high in their hearts; and Cremona saw that they were about to heap questions, in two languages, upon the foolish old man. He signalled to them with his hand to keep quiet.

"We have business with your master," he said.

"He will be very glad to see us, for we are relatives of the young lady, his niece."

"Of the *señorita?*" cried the old man. "English relatives of the Señorita Isobel? Ah, that is interesting. I can see, at a glance, that the two younger gentlemen are English; but not you, *señor*. Still, let that pass. I have wondered about the beautiful young lady's relatives. And is it true, *señor*, that the Señor Alcazardo is her uncle?"

"Yes, it is true. And he is her guardian, as well," replied Cremona. "But these gentlemen are her near relatives, and we have come a long way to visit your master and the young lady."

"Well, well, to think of it — and the two of them gone away these months back," said Juan.

"What d'ye say? Where have they gone to?" cried Dick, limping forward and clutching the old fellow's shoulder.

Juan shrank back.

"Leave him to me. The man is honest enough, but a bit of a fool," said Cremona, in English. Then, to Juan, "The English gentleman is of a quick temper, but you must not mind him," he said. "Tell me when your master and the lady went away, and where they went to. Here is a little piece of the right colour that you may be able to make some use of." He passed a

gold coin into the old fellow's hand. "We are anxious to know how it is that the *señor* went away without taking his invaluable servant along with him."

Juan told every word that he knew and a great deal that he only suspected. He had been about five years in Alcazardo's employ, and had come, ten years before, from a distant part of Spain. He was the caretaker of the big house which Alcazardo owned, and had never seen very much of his employer. The house was usually empty; and even when he was there Alcazardo made no display and received but few visitors. He had nothing to do with the city of Cadiz or with his neighbours, rich or poor. In fact, admitted Juan, it was as much as his position was worth to mention the *señor's* name.

He had an idea that the *señor* was a great man in Madrid, and there spent all his time and money. Well, he'd not set eyes on his master for a matter of two years, when, one fine day, he drove up in a carriage with the beautiful young lady beside him. The young lady had found the house very dull. His master had engaged two more servants immediately — one of them a maid for the *señorita* — and they had lived on the fat of the land.

Yes, the *señor* treated the young lady like a queen. And so on and so on. The old man forgot nothing. He

told of the visits of the man with the black beard, of Alcazardo's departure by night, of the note for Isobel, and of her sudden departure. He explained that his granddaughter, the maid, had gone with her mistress.

"And where did they go? And how did they go?" asked Cremona, after he had translated everything for Francis.

Juan begged permission to replenish his glass. He took a slow sip or two with the air of a man about to disclose the result of some very deep thinking.

"In the letter to the *señorita*," he said, "the *señor* wrote that they were bound for England. But I do not think that was the truth, for there are many fine vessels in the city that sail frequently to England — and yet the *señor* did not sail from Cadiz, but from a little cove miles away from here, in a wild country. I discovered this by much toil and wit, for the *señor* did not confide in me. I found the man who had driven the carriage, on both occasions; and from him learned that the *señor*, the *señorita*, and Maria had been rowed away from the shore in a small boat and had been taken aboard a schooner.

"At first I thought that the *señor* had gone away in this secret manner simply to give the slip to people who might be pressing him for money; but later, after much reflection, I decided that it was not for lack of

money that my master practised such a sly way of life in general. So I went again to the man who had driven the carriage; and from him I learned, after paying money I could ill afford, that the man with the black beard and the *señor* were partners in a queer business that sounded to him like smuggling — or worse.

"He had overheard a few words to put this idea in his head. Also he had heard the *señor* tell the man with the black beard that, though he was not going to England, yet he intended to live a quiet life from now on and would, some day, settle down in one of the English colonies as a very proper old gentleman. So you may be sure that the *señor* and the young lady have not gone to England."

The three gentlemen were greatly relieved in their minds by the information obtained from Juan. Though it made their quest seem all the more hopeless, yet it led them to believe that Isobel was not in immediate danger, in whatever part of the world she might be.

Alcazardo had stolen her money; but, evidently, he was keeping up the play of being her affectionate uncle. Perhaps he was not quite so bad as they had feared. Perhaps he was only a thief and a liar, after all. It might be that he was even planning to return to Virginia, fortified against Fairwood by Isobel's trust and

ready to meet the charge of theft with a pack of plausible lies.

Drurie and Cremona accompanied old Juan back to Alcazardo's house and heard the same story from the lips of his daughter, who had been the cook during Isobel's brief stay in the place. The old man and his daughter, and the daughter's husband and children, occupied the servants' quarters of the house, rent free.

The woman spoke highly of Alcazardo. Indeed, in that part of the world he had never shown his cloven hoof.

"The *señor* has a kind heart," said the woman, "and his manners are beautiful. He was like a father to the *señorita*."

They gave old Juan a package of blank paper addressed to a firm of merchants in Bristol, and another addressed to a firm in London; and these he was to despatch by the earliest opportunity after seeing or hearing anything more of his master's movements. Then they paid him well for his information and returned to their inn.

It was April when Francis and Dick and Cremona got back to Bristol. There they found Mr. Henry Fairwood, of Fairwood Manor, Virginia, waiting for them.

Fairwood had come to England to learn what he

could about Alcazardo, and had already heard what the London bankers had to tell. Arriving in Bristol, he had learned from Nicholas that Francis and two friends had gone to London and from there to Spain; and so he had settled himself comfortably to await their return.

After recovering from the meeting with Dick, he heard the story of their quest.

"I'll go to that place," he swore, "and I'll live in that house — and there I'll be if that rascal ever comes home. Cæsar, he'll find me at headquarters; and if he won't give me the girl quietly, I'll put a bullet in his heart!"

CHAPTER XVII

THE BRAVE ADVENTURE A GOOD FIGHTER

Mr. Fairwood did not start for Spain until after the sailing of the *Brave Adventure* for Hudson Bay. Francis was still in command of the ship; for Fairwood had urged him not to give up his work. He had pointed out that nothing could be done beyond keeping a sharp eye on the house near Cadiz — and that was what he himself meant to do.

"If he so much as shows his nose I'll be on him," said the old man. "Go and do your work, lad, and trust to fate — aye, and to your Uncle Henry. 'Twill all come right, I tell you. The man hasn't courage enough to do more than steal and lie and make a monkey of himself. You'll find that I have the girl safe and sound when you get back, never fear."

So Francis sailed away on the *Brave Adventure*, and Mr. Fairwood set out next day for Spain, with hope and courage in his heart, and the two trusty servants he had brought with him all the way from Virginia.

With Captain Francis Drurie sailed two gentlemen adventurers who had not made the first voyage — Mr. St. George and Captain Cremona. Both these gentlemen had wanted to help Mr. Fairwood in his passive game in Spain; but they had been told to go about their business like men. So they had gone, feeling deep in their hearts that there was as much likelihood of finding Alcazardo on the sea as in Spain.

The master of the *Brave Adventure* was a middle-aged mariner named Benjamin Danvers. He was a brave, capable fellow and a great admirer and firm friend of Drurie's. Under him were two mates, a boatswain, and twelve sailors. Under Drurie's control were his lieutenant, young Lawrence Prowse, two adventurers besides Dick and Cremona, Duff and Tizard by name, Master-gunners Mann and Tyler, four gunners' mates and a master-armourer.

Drurie was in command of the ship; but Danvers was supreme as sailing-master. It was for Drurie to name the course, but for the master to sail it. It was not in the commander's province to give orders to, or in any way interfere with, the sailors at their work; but the moment the guns were manned the master, his mates, and his mariners came under Drurie's command in everything. This system of

marine administration called for tact and fairmindedness on the part of the commander and the master, and, indeed, on the part of all the officers.

The *Brave Adventure* soon had the rest of the little fleet hull-down astern. Shortly before sunset, Drurie ascended to the high poop-deck, with the master at his right hand, Mr. Prowse at his left, and the gentlemen and the two mates behind him. The boatswain piped both watches on deck and paraded them in the waist of the ship.

It was a scene typical of those rough, unsophisticated days when manliness was the common characteristic of all classes of Englishmen. The fellows in the waist were of all ages and all sizes. The boatswain was a thin little man of over sixty years of age, with a long white scar on his brown neck, two fingers gone from his right hand, a pigtail tarred like a stay, a whimsical mouth and eyes as round and quick as a bird's. One of the master-gunners was big, elderly, and ruddy-faced; the other lank, young, and brown of skin. The master-armourer had the face and bearing of a parson's clerk; but his earrings, crimson sash, and great boots of yellow Spanish leather suggested a less peaceful way of life. The variety of age, attire, and physical appearance continued throughout the remainder of the crew. The officers on the poop were

scarcely more uniform in any of these particulars. All except the two mates wore their swords.

Francis Drurie's face was thin and pale; but, as he looked down at his men, his eyes brightened and a tinge of red warmed his cheeks.

"Lads," he said, "here we are again, bound on a long and rough voyage. We'll run the risks of fog, wind and drifting ice. But we have good timber under our feet and good spars and hemp aloft, and honest work to do for the king and the company. Speaking for Master Danvers and myself, and the other officers, I ask you to show the same courage and willingness as you showed last year. I ask no more than that. Let the new men follow the old, and they'll not go wrong — for the lads who sailed with me last voyage proved themselves hearts of oak. Do your work as honest sailors and you shall be treated as all honest lads are treated aboard the *Brave Adventure*. Boatswain, rum for all hands."

He lifted his hat to the rough fellows, smiled down at them and turned away. Then the crew roared all together as one man. They waved their tarry hands aloft and shouted their commander's name with all their might. Drurie turned and bowed again, his face aglow and his eyes gleaming.

Dick, who went by the name of St. George, and Cre-

mona got along finely with the other gentlemen and the crew. Dick was not inclined to talk, and Cremona was inclined to chatter all the time; and yet they were both popular. Cremona told wonderful stories of famous people and strange places — few of which, I fear, were true. But they were interesting tales and ruined no reputations.

Fore and aft, peace and good will reigned aboard the *Brave Adventure.* The commander and the master never clashed, the gentlemen engaged in no bickerings; the men did their work and sang their songs and kept their knives to cut their salt beef and scrape the spars with. No head winds came to delay them, and no fog shrouded them; and so, for eight days, the little ship held peacefully on her course, all well inboard and overboard, aloft and alow.

On the morning of the ninth day out of Bristol, while the gentlemen were breakfasting, White, the second mate, thrust his head into the cabin.

"Schooner on the port quarter, sir, bearing up under all sail," he said.

This was addressed to Drurie; but the commander turned to Danvers as if to refer the matter to him.

Danvers left his seat at the crowded table.

"She may be a French privateer, sir, or a Sallee

rover or some other breed of pirate," he said. "What are your wishes, sir?"

"Hold to your course under reduced sail, Master Danvers," replied Francis.

Danvers grinned and hurried from the cabin. The gentlemen ceased talking and began to eat very fast, eager to get on deck.

The *Brave Adventure's* mainsail was furled and two of her jibs were hauled down. This reduced her pace by several knots an hour. All hands gathered on the decks for a look at the strange vessel that was so openly cracking on all sail to overhaul them. They were of opinion that the schooner was not a trading vessel; and in this their hearts spoke. The schooner grew momentarily to the view. Francis studied her through his telescope for a long time, without comment. The master, standing beside him, also had his glass bearing on her.

"What do you make of her?" asked Francis.

"I make her either Spanish or English, sir, an' a smart craft," replied Danvers.

Drurie handed his telescope to Cremona. "Tell me if you ever saw anything just like her before," he said.

Cremona looked, and uttered an exclamation of wonder and delight. "I think I see her one day —

or her very twin sister — off the coast o' Portugal," he said.

Francis Drurie laughed lightly and, with his hands clasped behind him, fell to pacing the narrow deck from rail to rail. He felt sure that the approaching vessel was an enemy of some sort. Ten to one it was the same craft that gave them such a dashing shoreward race on the day they beached the *Merry Andrew* on the rocks of the desolate cove.

Here was something to take his mind for a little while off his gnawing worries. Here he was, with his own ship under him and trusty men round him on the threshold of his first sea-fight. His blood drummed in his arteries and he felt an impulse to shout.

But he must keep cool. Here were thirty men and a fine ship ready to do his bidding. He must keep clear-headed, and prove himself worthy of their trust. He halted, turned a flushed face toward the schooner, and then touched Danvers on the arm.

"We must fight to a finish," he said. "I want play at long range for a little while; and if that does not fix her, broadsides at pistol-range. But do not let her get her irons on us, for they may be three to our one. Now it is for you to sail and for me to fight."

Danvers grasped the commander's hand. "I'll do

my best, captain," said he. "I'll lay her to your taste, sir, never fear."

The schooner was sweeping up on them at a fine pace, now pitching high, now dippping her sharp bow deep as the gilded fiddles. Danvers shot a calculating glance at her, and then bellowed forward. In a minute the big mainsail was shaken out again and the brig sprang ahead. Drurie, who was inspecting the crews of the guns, noticed this and smiled. He knew that Danvers was not running away.

Still the schooner drew nearer. A topsail was furled aboard the brig and the two upper jibs were run up again. The master wanted her just so, and was sparing no pains to get her exactly suited to his needs. He wanted her swift and handy at the same time. The mate seemed to echo his commands almost before they were clear of his lips. The first mate stood by the mainmast and the second by the fore. The boatswain's pipe shrilled merrily. The commander went the rounds of the little ship, with a word of encouragement for every one.

He gave Prowse command of one broadside of four heavy cannon and Dick command of the other. He posted Tizard forward with the bow-chaser and Duff aft with the four swivels. He kept Cremona with him; and Nicholas followed the two, with his master's

telescope under one arm and a cutlass under the other.

The decks were cleared for action. Cutlasses and muskets were served to all hands, the guns loaded and the linstocks and pots of red coals were brought to the gunners. Now Danvers had the sails to his liking, and handed over eight of his mariners to Drurie for service with the guns.

The schooner, still drawing gradually nearer, fired a gun from her bows. The shot fell short of the brig. At that, Drurie ran up the red ensign of England. In answer, a great square of black crawled up to the foretop of the schooner. A roar of anger and derision went up from the decks of the *Brave Adventure*. Drurie left the poop and again made a round of the guns, the men cheering at the sight of him. Again the schooner fired, with the same lack of result as before.

The brig swung southward a few points. Then Mr. Prowse, who commanded the guns on the port side, took off his coat, bared his right arm to the elbow and drew his sword. He came of a sea-fighting family and had the heart of a giant behind his ribs; but he was young, slender of build, with a pink-and-white face and an arm like a girl's.

"Man your guns, my lads," he cried. "We'll have the first crack at them, by the looks of things.

It will be a guinea for each gun if the splinters fly at the first round."

The schooner was nearer now, heading a trifle more to the westward, with the wind fair over her taffrail. Now she furled her topsail and stowed her gafftopsail. Again she fired; and this time the shot went skipping over the water about fifty yards from the brig's stern. Prowse looked up anxiously at Drurie. Drurie met the glance and nodded.

"On her hull, lads," cried Prowse. "Not too high. Steady. Fire!"

The priming in the touch-holes flashed and the big guns roared and recoiled, and the white smoke poured out and clung to the jumping seas.

From the brig the eager watchers saw a stick of timber spring up from the schooner's rail and rip through her mainsail.

"So we gets our money, I take it," observed an ancient mariner.

After another volley from Mr. Prowse's guns which hulled the schooner high above the water-line, the *Brave Adventure* circled to the west and north again. The schooner shifted after her, firing again and again from the great gun in her bows, bent on knocking a spar out of her quarry and then getting to close quarters.

Twenty minutes passed in silence aboard the brig.

A ball from the pirate entered the empty forecastle. Another sank into the heavy timber under the neck of the tiller. Then Dick's guns bellowed out, hurling their iron defiance into the enemy's rigging. The schooner swung and replied with a broadside of light metal that did nothing more than knock a few splinters into the air.

The vessels drew gradually closer, sailing the same course, with the schooner to windward. Musketry fire opened on the schooner and the balls began humming over the brig's bulwarks. Then Dick's four guns spoke again and the schooner's foretopmast fell to port, and hung in a useless mass of flapping canvas and tangled cordage. And that was the beginning of the end.

Danvers worked the *Brave Adventure* to windward of the crippled pirate. Keeping clear of her heavy bow-chaser, he gave Drurie the opportunity to send broadside after broadside into her. There was no danger now of the grappling-irons of the schooner getting their clutch upon the brig.

The company's vessel chose her position and battered her late pursuer at any range that suggested itself to the master and the commander.

Surrender is a thing unknown to craft of the schooner's kidney — for a man had better die fighting than

kicking his feet in the air with a rope around his neck. So the schooner's black flag flew until the topmast fell, and was then run up in the mizzen rigging.

At last Drurie requested the master to lay the brig aboard the disabled, shattered hulk. It was accomplished within fifteen minutes of the word, Mr. Prowse scorching the schooner's side with a final volley of his guns even as the two vessels came together. Irons were thrown, and the big, broken schooner and the little, uninjured brig closed in a death-grip. This was the pirate's last chance.

Her company of eighty cutthroats had been reduced to a disorganized handful by the gun and musket fire of the brig; but that desperate handful scrambled aboard the *Brave Adventure.*

The first to leap upon the brig's deck was a short, sturdy fellow with a great, black beard twisted into a dozen little tails, each tail tied with a yellow ribbon. He flashed a cutlass and roared like a bull. But Cremona met him — and that was the end of the career of Black Monk, one of the bloodiest pirates of the time and a business acquaintance of the Señor Josef Alcazardo.

His followers were speedily served in the same way, every rogue of them fighting to the last. The decks of the *Brave Adventure* ran red with the blood of her

enemies. After twenty minutes of this frantic struggle there was not a pirate left to hang to the yard-arm.

Francis Drurie and a small escort went aboard the schooner to investigate. They found her in ballast. The hull was shot through in a dozen places, and she was filling fast. Every spar was more or less disabled. Every gun was dismounted and dead men sprawled everywhere. A fire was smouldering in a mass of fallen sails on the forecastle-head. Amidships, in the litter of corpses, splintered wood, blood, and overthrown gear, lay several puncheons of rum with the bungs out. The rank liquor mixed with the ranker blood in the scuppers.

Drurie entered the houses under the high poop-deck. On the table in the outer cabin lay scattered playing-cards, a couple of leather dice-boxes, and a broken bottle. The table was wet, and a puddle of wine lay on the table. Mr. Prowse stooped and picked something from the floor. It was a small shot from one of the brig's swivels.

"Duff broke the bottle," he remarked, with a nervous laugh.

Duff laughed, too, quite immoderately. They were young men; and, though they had made more than one voyage, this was their first experience in exter-

"AFTER TWENTY MINUTES OF THIS FRANTIC STRUGGLE THERE WAS NOT A PIRATE LEFT."

minating pirates. They were both a trifle shaken, beyond a doubt.

Tizard was cooler. He had once sailed a voyage to the West Indies as a midshipman aboard a sloop-of-war.

"I put a shot hereabouts," he said, hunting around. "Danvers didn't give me many chances; but I took what he gave. Ah, here we are!" He pointed with an air of satisfaction at a hole low in the port side of the cabin and at another low in the starboard side. "I wish they'd been playing cards when that went through," he said.

Drurie kicked open a door in the forward bulkhead and passed into the inner cabin, with his gentlemen crowding after him. The cabin was a fine one, gilded and carved and hung with silk. It was the full width of the stern. There were long lockers aft, under the square ports, and a bunk against the forward bulkhead. Fine rugs covered the deck underfoot. The gentlemen kicked these rugs into a heap and soon found a little hatch. It was locked; so they broke it open with an ax. In a twinkling they were down in the lazaretto. Only the commander and two seamen remained above in the cabin.

Drurie went to the bunk and felt under the pillows and mattress. First he produced a small pistol,

beautifully inlaid with gold and mother-of-pearl. This he passed to one of the men, who placed it on the table. Next came a small leather bag full of all manner of sparkling gems; then a canvas bag full of gold coins, another of silver coins, and yet another of all kinds of gold and silver trinkets, some with jewels set in them, and some without.

As the men spread the contents of the bags on the table, Drurie glanced over them indifferently. But suddenly, with a sharp cry, he stepped forward and snatched up one of the trinkets.

It was a small gold cross, studded with pearls.

He held it close to his eyes, staring horribly. His face went gray as ashes. "My God!" he cried, leaning heavily against the table.

Two of the seamen put their arms about him. Still he stared at the little cross in the palm of his hand. At that moment, Dick came up from the lazaretto with two dull bars of silver in his arms; but at sight of his friend's face he let them fall and sprang forward.

"What is it? Are you hurt?" he cried, pushing one of the men aside.

Drurie shook his head and held the little cross before Dick's eyes. Dick looked at it, wonderingly at first, and then with a light of terrified recognition in his eyes.

Yes, it was like the cross his sister had always worn at her throat, since she was a little girl. He remembered now — Francis had given it to her for a birthday gift.

Suddenly Drurie slipped the cross into his pocket and began to hunt through the other trinkets. He spread the little pile of gold and silver with trembling fingers. Here were rings and brooches, bracelets and earrings; but not one of these did he recognize as ever having been worn by Isobel.

Dick, reading his thought, began searching through the contents of the other bags; but nothing other than the pearl-studded cross resembled anything of Isobel's.

"There are a thousand crosses like that in the world," said Dick.

"I hope it is so," replied Francis, looking about him like one just awakened from an evil dream.

Now, all the gentlemen were up from the lazaretto, with a small treasure of bar silver, silks, spices, and such costly merchandise.

A sailor looked into the cabin. "She be settlin' fast, sir," he said.

"Gather up the stuff," ordered Drurie, "and get back to the brig."

Then he searched every inch of the cabin, tearing down the hangings with his hands; but nothing of Isobel's could he find.

CHAPTER XVIII

ISOBEL LEARNS HER UNCLE'S REAL NATURE

ALCAZARDO'S little schooner, the *Twelve Apostles*, bore westward and southward across the Atlantic day after day, with fine weather and fair winds.

Once she was sighted and followed for a few hours by an English war-ship, and on another occasion a big topsail-schooner wasted half a day in driving along in her wake.

When Isobel recovered from the swoon caused by Alcazardo's sudden disclosure of his duplicity, she found herself in a tiny cabin, lying in a narrow berth, with Maria bending over her. She stared vaguely at the maid for a moment, then remembered and understood.

For a little while anger and scorn drove fear and caution from her, and she went straight up to the deck and charged her uncle with being a liar and a rascal. He laughed quietly; but later he came down to her cabin and warned her against another such outbreak. He spoke calmly enough, but she trembled before the light in his eyes.

"And I want you and your maid to understand," he said, "that I am not known aboard this craft or on my island as either Alcazardo or your uncle. I am Captain Gomez, and you are my daughter. Understand this, or it will be the worse for you."

For two weeks Isobel did not once look at or speak to her uncle; but at last it came to her that her only hope of ever escaping from him lay in hiding her real feelings from him as much as possible. She was young, and while she lived there would always be hope; but worldly hope cannot survive death.

Yes, she was young, and life meant the chance of finding her lover again. She would try to hide her hate and suffering. She would watch the rascal. If need be, she would kill him. She would treasure her life day by day, guarding it with lies and deception. She would risk everything but her honour to save it; for, if life were to bring her again to her lover, it was dearer to her than everything but honour.

When the island was sighted she pretended interest in it. Her uncle smiled sardonically. But he loved to talk, possessing the social instinct to an amazing degree. He told her, in glowing terms, what a charming spot it was, and of the beautiful house surrounded by groves and gardens.

She looked at him with tears in her eyes. The

tears were genuine, but the pleading, trusting tones in which she spoke to him were not.

"But we shall not live here a great while? You will take me back to Virginia soon, won't you?" she said.

He looked at her sharply, with a sneering smile. So she was a harmless fool, after all. He had begun to fear that she had a mind. He was glad to find that she was a fool. He had robbed her and lied to her, and here she was looking at him like a dove.

"My dear," he said, with something of his old manner, "I am so hounded by my enemies that I fear we shall have to live quietly on my little island there for a year or two. I have many troubles, so you must forgive me, my dear, if I sometimes act and speak in a way that hurts your tender feelings."

"I know you do not mean to be unkind," replied the girl faintly.

There was a certain excitement in this play that raised her spirits. She could see that the man believed her to be a fool. Ah, he should learn, some day, who was the fool!

He talked to her as to a child, without trying to keep the sneering amusement which he felt from his voice and manner.

"And what shall I do when we go back to Virginia?" he asked. "Your friends do not like me; and I am

too poor a man to live in one of those fine houses and keep up a fine place?"

"But when I tell everybody how kind you have been to me, they will be kind to you," replied the girl. "And if you are poor, you can have my money; and Hopeland, too, when I marry."

Alcazardo could scarcely believe his ears. He glanced away and grinned devilishly. Why, a man could do anything with a fool like this! After all, he had stolen only half her property; and old Fairwood was sure to die, in a year or two, of overeating. It was worth considering. She would give him Hopeland, would she?

"I could not think of accepting your property, my dear," he said, with a leer.

"But, as you are poor, you must," she replied guilelessly. "I shall not need it. But please tell me why you are not known by your real name on this ship and on the island? I hope you have not done anything wrong."

This was just the kind of idiotic question Alcazardo was expecting from the simple little fool. It was interesting — almost as interesting as the first winning of her trust in Virginia. But never until now had he suspected her of being quite so stupid and trusting as the last few minutes had proved her.

"My dear girl," he said, "the officers of the law are after me for shooting a man. It happened before I ever saw you. I was walking along a quiet street in Madrid one day, when I saw a man attack a woman and beat her with a stick. I was so overcome with rage that I drew a pistol and shot him. He was a great man; and I have been hunted ever since. I have been afraid to tell you this, my dear Isobel, for I could not bear to have you look upon me as a murderer."

"I think it was very noble of you," replied the girl, looking at him with wonder in her eyes.

But the wonder was at the ease and fertility of his imagination and the depth of his rascality.

"If I must pretend to be your daughter, I must call you father," she said.

He laughed aloud, and patted her head as a man pats the head of an amusing dog.

"Certainly, my dear," he said in a nasty but merry vein. "Call me papa, by all means. I am proud of my lovely, clever daughter. And when we go back to Virginia, what a stir the poor old *don* will make, to be sure, with his beautiful daughter and his fine son-in-law. I see that I have great times before me."

Isobel retired to her cabin for a little while. She prayed — and it was a queer prayer. She prayed to be forgiven the lies which she had spoken and acted,

and for strength and cunning to tell and act more lies.

She was soon on deck again, standing timidly beside her uncle and gazing with round eyes and exclamations of assumed delight at the white-and-green island that grew so swiftly in the field of sparkling blue.

As the little schooner drew near the eastern coast, the master of the island saw a small group of men down on the white beach between the lagoon and the fringe of cocoanut-trees. One was waving a white flag frantically seaward. Through his telescope the proprietor could see that the others of the group were facing landward and held muskets in their hands. His black eyes fairly glistened with rage. He called the master of the schooner to him.

"I have been away from my darlings too long this trip," he said. "See, they have driven their drivers almost into the lagoon. Clear the bow-gun and load her with canister, and we'll let them know that the *don* has come home again."

He smiled as he spoke, but it was a smile to chill a man's blood. The big gun in the schooner's bow was stripped of her canvas jacket, loaded, and run forward in double time. It was easy to see that the rough, masterless-looking fellows were in fear of Alcazardo.

He stepped close to one of them — a huge, blond

fellow with the devil's mark on his face and a body like a gladiator's — and the fellow shrank aside with a little gasp of fear. The *don* had his children well in hand.

Now the schooner was within a hundred yards of the mouth of the gap in the reef opening into the lagoon. She moved slowly and steadily forward under her main-jib. From her deck a mob of blacks and ragged, brick-red whites could be seen among the gray stems of the cocoanut-trees. They were armed with hoes and cane-knives. They shouted mad, wordless threats at the half-dozen fellows on the beach, and even at the schooner.

The schooner drifted through the gap. Alcazardo sighted the long cannon. At the glow of the red spark of the linstock, the men on the sand ran to the very edge of the water and threw themselves flat. The poor maddened fools beyond dashed out into open sight. Then the cannon belched and roared across the still waters of the lagoon.

Half a dozen of the slaves fell and twisted on the white sand. The others turned and fled, their cries of anger thinned to screams of fear.

One of the overseers scrambled to his feet, screamed, and fell forward into the water. Alcazardo smiled, took the burning linstock from the gunner and touched it to the tip of a slender roll of paper and tobacco

which he held between his lips. In returning it, he struck the flame against the gunner's wrist. The fellow did not flinch, but a horrid film of terror dimmed his eyes.

"That was a good shot," said the master of the island. "Now they know that the *don* is home again and the days of love and peace returned."

Isobel had gone to her cabin, white of face and convulsed with sobs, the moment after the firing of the cannon. Maria followed her. Isobel turned and threw her arms around the other's neck.

"To think," she cried, "he murders, and smiles! Oh, Maria, we have come to hell itself! May I have strength to look him in the eyes — to blind him — to befool him. He shoots down his labourers as one would shoot quail!"

The Spanish maid was frightened, and did her best to quiet her mistress.

"But they had knives in their hands," she said. "They were terrible. They were like beasts. The *señor* had to fire upon them, to save the poor men on the sand."

"Yes, Maria, you are right and — I am very foolish," replied the lady, in low, hard tones. "The beasts were ready to kill their loving master. How he must grieve at having killed one of his overseers."

They heard the cable roar over the iron lip of the hawse-hole, and the splash of the anchor in the lagoon.

Isobel dried her eyes, forced a smile to her lips, and returned to the deck. The maid followed her.

The schooner was at rest on the crystal water, midway between the reef and the beach of powdered coral. Already a boat was pulling away from her, with Alcazardo in the stern-sheets. The master of the little craft stepped up to Isobel with a respectful salutation.

"The *don* has gone ashore to set things right for your arrival, *señorita*," he said. "He will return for you in a few minutes."

Isobel eyed him steadily. "Have you been long in the service of — of my father?" she asked, speaking very quietly.

The mariner shifted from one mahogany-hued foot to the other, and gazed landward. "For a matter of two years, maybe," he said.

"What is this vessel used for?" asked the girl.

"For trading among the islands. But see, the *don* is looking back at us," replied the fellow nervously. "I'd better get along with my work."

The *don*, as everybody called Alcazardo on the schooner, soon returned for Isobel, Maria, and his own

and their baggage. He seemed in high spirits, as if the little matter of the charge of canister had cheered him.

He helped Isobel over the rail and into the boat with a fine air. He lifted Maria down bodily — and Maria blushed and flashed her black eyes at him.

The boat was beached near the spot where the overseer had fallen. The body had been carried away, but there was still a dabble of blood on the sand. Further up the shore two slaves were lifting the last remaining body of their murdered comrades — and these were two of the same who had brandished their cane-knives so defiantly only a few minutes before.

A narrow path led through the grove of cocoanut-trees. The underbrush on either hand, between the smooth, gray stems, was of whitewood and manchineel. The pale-brown soil was full of holes into which great land-crabs scuttled and turned, ready to scuttle out again.

From the landward edge of the grove Isobel had her first sight of the house — a full view of it all in a flash, looking like a picture in a book. It stood on a gentle rise of land, pink-walled, pink-roofed, with wide, low eaves and deep galleries. In front, a dozen cabbage-palms lifted their rustling crests high in the sweep of the trades; the long leaves springing with

almost artificial regularity from the green, jade-like stem that topped the gray pillar of the trunk.

At one side stood the squat tower of the windmill in which the canes were crushed, and a cluster of stables and outhouses; and between these and the house a walled garden, with bright, strange foliage gleaming above the walls.

On the other side stood a fine grove of mahogany-trees; and everywhere gleamed the tender green of sugar-canes and the banner-like leaves of bananas and plantains. A mile away, in the centre of the island, arose two moderate, rounded hills shrouded in dark foliage. Overhead swam a cloudless sky of palest azure.

The first few days of Isobel's stay on the little island of Madiana, of which the *don* was sole proprietor and the only settler, passed quietly. The house was large and comfortable, and through the windows and doors and along the galleries the wind drove steadily all day and all night.

Alcazardo was busy with affairs of the plantation; and those affairs seemed far away from the cool and quiet house. No smothered curses, cries of pain, or sound of blows reached the garden or the peaceful rooms.

For three days Isobel saw her uncle only during

meals, and he was sneeringly agreeable and a shade preoccupied. He spoke only of the most unimportant matters, and did not mention the dastardly deed by which he had announced his arrival to his slaves. Isobel had seen, on that first day, that several of these poor creatures were whites; but she did not dare, just then, to question Alcazardo on the point.

On the evening of the third day, after the sudden, purple night had fallen, Isobel happened upon her uncle and Maria talking earnestly together on the front steps of the gallery. The *don* came straight to Isobel, took her hand and drew her aside.

"Maria says that she wants to return to Spain," he said, in a voice sufficiently loud for the maid to hear. "I have been telling her that she cannot go home for some months — in fact, that she shall be taken to Virginia before she ever sees Spain again. I consider this very unkind of the girl, and I have told her so. You are a good mistress and a good friend to her. And she is well paid. I cannot understand what more she wants."

Isobel did not believe a word of this rigmarole. But she pretended to believe every word of it. "Oh, she does not mean it. Surely she does not mean to leave me!" she cried.

Maria slipped into the house without a word. Al-

cazardo told his ward to take heart, for the girl could not leave her, however much she might want to.

Isobel pretended to take comfort from this assurance. "I must beg her not to think of such a thing," she murmured, and ran into the house and up to the room which she shared with Maria.

She found the Spanish girl there sitting idly on the edge of her cot. She went to her, knelt before her and took both her hands in hers.

"Maria, tell me what you and the *señor* were talking about," she pleaded.

"I told him that it was my desire to return immediately to Spain," replied the maid in a small voice.

"Maria, you are not telling me the truth," said Isobel, accusingly. "You are repeating something that he has told you to say. I know it by your voice, even as I heard the lie in his. Have you, too, turned against me, Maria?"

The maid began to cry. "I have not turned against you," she sobbed. "But I fear the *señor* — and he treats me very kindly. I am but a poor servant-maid. I am not good and clever like you, Doña Isobel. You need not fear him, for you are a great lady, and rich, and he will treasure you for what you may do for him in the future. Oh, I see that. But who am I to dare to anger him? And yet he treats me very

kindly and — and I cannot tell you what he said to me."

"You need not tell me," returned Isobel. "Have you no spirit? Here is a knife — see, it is sharp as flame! I carry it always. Take it, Maria!"

"No, I do not want it!" cried the maid. "I am neither a great lady nor a fool. Life is good. If he loves me, why should I kill myself?"

"Poor creature. Poor little Maria," whispered her mistress; and she kissed her and wept over her.

Next morning Alcazardo said: "I have decided to let the girl go back to Spain, after all. Her heart is set on it; and I can find you a very good servant among the slave women. The schooner leaves at noon."

Isobel had not the heart to make any answer. She went to her room; and soon Maria came, kissed her passionately, wet her face with tears, and went away.

Isobel saw that the maid's eyes and cheeks were aglow; and she was silent under the wonder and horror of it. An hour later, she watched the little schooner sail out of the lagoon; and she knew that it was not bound for Spain, and that Maria was not on board.

Two months later, Isobel learned of Maria's death at the hands of a jealous mulatto woman.

CHAPTER XIX

THE ICE-FLOE

After her engagement with the schooner of the notorious Black Monk, the Royal Company's brig completed her westward voyage without further disturbance.

Drurie divided the treasure of the pirate among his officers and crew, every man being served according to his rating. The provisions from the schooner's lazaretto were not reckoned or divided, but went to the brig's credit, in bulk, and added much to the flavour of the meals in both cabin and forecastle.

They found the fort in a sorry state, only partially recovered from the distress of the long winter. They were received with a salute of cannon, feeble but well-intentioned cheering, and the capering of thin, bewhiskered men along the edge of the tide.

MacAllister, the commander of the fort, put off from shore in an Indian canoe, and was on the brig's deck before the anchors were let go. He was a man of thirty-five years of age, capable, quick-tempered,

proud as Lucifer, and poor as the soil on his native hills. He claimed descent from Adam, King Arthur, St. Andrew, and the prophets, and was in the habit of telling his friends that the tree of knowledge still grew and bore fruit on his father's estate in the Highlands of Scotland.

He was full of oaths and mad moods and the grandest lies concerning the power and antiquity of his family; but when he gave his word to a friend or an enemy the thing was already as good as done. He had seen military service in almost every country of Europe, had gone into Asia against the Turks, and had spent a year of his life pulling an oar in a Turkish galley. It was the opinion of his friends that his experiences in Turkey had put a twist in his brain.

He liked Francis Drurie — and his likes were as violent as his dislikes. The moment his feet touched the brig's deck he grabbed the commander in his long arms and pressed him to the breast of his faded coat with such abandonment of cordiality as almost to crack the Virginian's ribs.

"Welcome to Fort St. George and St. Andrew," he cried, his gray eyes flashing. "You are welcomer, Frank, than the King of England, for you are a better man!"

Then he told his troubles of the past winter; how

his lieutenant had died of scurvy, and his chief carpenter, his smith, and three labourers had followed along the same grim path within the week; how two men had been killed by savages, another lost in the wilderness, and three caught by a storm of wind and snow, while hunting, and frozen to death. It was a pitiful tale.

"And I expect the French to move against us before the summer is over. No doubt the savages have carried word of us to them long before this," he concluded.

The gentlemen of the *Brave Adventure* were soon ashore, and most of the crew followed the moment the sails were furled and everything was made fast and shipshape. The stores for the fort were hurried out of the brig's hold, a small measure of rum was served to all hands, and MacAllister announced that to celebrate the arrival of the first vessel of the fleet, a feast and general merrymaking would be held as soon as the day's work was over. This was received with cheers by landsmen and sailors alike.

Then Drurie mounted the cask of salt beside the commander of the fort and said that he intended to devote his share of the treasure taken from the pirate-schooner to prizes for contests in marksmanship with musket and pistol, in sword-play, in felling trees with

axes, and in many more sports and works. There should be separate contests in every event, he explained, for the sailors and the men of the fort, as the landsmen had suffered from lack of food.

The men shouted and danced with delight, and even the gentlemen cheered Drurie's generosity. But the commander of the brig took small joy of the ovation; for, ever since the fight with the schooner, every hour was haunted by the little cross in his pocket.

Was it the cross Isobel had worn on her white neck? Or, was it one of many crosses as like it as two musket-balls are alike? He did not know. Sometimes he was sure of the one thing, and sometimes of the other.

The feast was a success and put new heart into the settlers. A score of friendly natives shared the great company's bounty, and joined in the dancing that followed the eating, and sat like graven images through the singing and story-telling. Captain MacAllister danced the sword-dance, Francis and Prowse sang, and Cremona gave an exhibition of knife-throwing. Dawn was in the east before the little fort was quiet and the ashes of the fires were black.

Under the stimulus of full rations and excitement, the fort seemed to gain new life. Work and play went on, side by side. Clearings were extended into the forest on every side of the fort as a precaution against

sudden attack by Frenchmen or natives. The stockade was enlarged and strengthened, a new house was built for MacAllister, and all the cabins were repaired. A brisk trade was carried on with the natives from near and far; small parties explored the forests and the coast, and fish were caught in the sea and the rivers and smoked for winter use. The contests in sports and workmanship were warmly engaged in and occupied the men's spare time for fully a month. The summer was short; and at the first hint of the quick frosts the hunters set out after moose and caribou.

The crews of the three ships joined them in this work and in the gathering of wild berries; and afterward in the manufacture of pemmican from the meat and berries. By this time, the commanders and masters of the ships were beginning to feel uneasy. The cargoes of pelts were put under hatches; and early on the morning that the first thin shell of ice was found on the ponds around the fort, two of the vessels sailed away. Francis had to remain three days longer, waiting for Dick and several members of his crew who were down the coast in the brig's long-boat. But at last the capstan-bars were manned aboard the *Brave Adventure*, the anchors walked up and lashed, and the square sails unfurled.

Winter comes swiftly to that northern sea. For a

little while the sun has held back the merciless desire of the frost, and the silence; leaves have budded and blown, butterflies have spread their painted wings; and then, as if the forces of death had been waiting just behind the hills, desolation returns to wood and stream.

Out on the sea the brief, azure days are done. Clouds mount from the hidden pits of storm; fogs and snow trail their shrouds across the shaken waves; the voice of the surf fails along the gray coasts, silenced by the black strip of ice that widens hour by hour. Snow falls, and the land and the ice are as one; then the winds and currents struggle in those nameless wastes and the new ice is broken and tossed adrift. The surf shouts again along the rocks — but in the stillness of the night, in a falling silence, again the frost shackles the living water.

The *Brave Adventure* raced for the open sea, striving to clear the narrow straits before the frost should close its hand upon the north. She drove eastward and northward across the great bay, under every yard of canvas she could spread. Hour by hour the appalling shadow of winter — a shadow seen with the eyes of the spirit — loomed higher above the northern horizon.

The men felt it. On deck and aloft it cut deep into

their courage, though the cold was not yet severe; in the warmth of cabin and forecastle it rang a faint, strange echo to their laughter. It was not the cold they feared, but the blind, gripping ice.

"We must drive her," said the master to Drurie. "So long as this wind holds we are safe. If we get half-way through the straits before it shifts to the north we can beat the ice to the sea."

The wind failed — then blew fitfully from the south. On a warm, bright morning they rounded into the narrow seaway, and crept forward east by south. The sunlight, and the knowledge that this was the course that reached to England, raised the spirits of all save the more experienced mariners.

Danvers did not like it, and watched the sea and the sky at every point of the compass as if he expected an attack. He kept the brig well up toward the dreary, frozen coast to the north — so close that it could be seen with the naked eye, like a bank of pale fog along the horizon. The day passed comfortably, but with little progress. With the setting of the sun the wind died away, and a sudden chill flooded the air.

In the outer cabin the gentlemen sat around the the table, or lay in their berths and listened to the talk of their comrades and the weird complaining of the ship's timbers. Not one of them save Cremona

seemed to be able to keep his mind on any subject for more than a minute at a time. They listened for something they could not name — listened with half-turned heads, furtively. They felt a menace they did not understand. They feared neither storm nor battle; but the fear of the North was in their hearts. They listened for the strong, enlivening buffet of the wind; and, not hearing it, they felt an anxiety that they scarcely tried to conceal.

But Cremona was himself — outwardly, at least. He sat at the table with a bottle of wine before him and told a story that nobody listened to. It was a fine story, too, and as full of lies as any history. To catch young Prowse's wandering attention, he leaned across the table and poked him in the shoulder with one of his great fingers.

"I tell you," he said, "that the French lady turned as white as that candle, and fell, herself, quick into my arms, and cried loud for me to save her valued life. And what did I do — can you think? I knocked her softly out of my course, with a polite word, and struck those two pirates with my might. One of those vile fellows drove a knife — "

"Hark! What was that?" whispered Prowse, brushing away Cremona's finger and half rising from his seat.

"Bah! You hear your brains shake. Now listen to me," said Cremona.

Prowse paid no attention to him. "What is Drurie doing on deck? Why does he stay up in the cold? Danvers can sail the ship without his help."

"Now, you listen to me," drawled Cremona, and went on with the yarn to which nobody would listen.

And they thought he was acting like a fool; whereas he was doing his best to turn their minds from the menace in the air.

Neither Drurie nor Danvers left the deck that night. Shortly after midnight a puff of wind struck the brig and fled, leaving the spars creaking and the shrouds rattling. She had scarcely settled to quiet after that buffet when the wind descended upon her in earnest out of the west.

It blew steady and strong, bowling her along under scanty sails. The seas arose as if by magic, pitching the little vessel dizzily as the wind raced her along. The commander and the master stood close together by the tiller. The night was so black that they could not see each other's face.

"Is this what you expected?" asked Drurie, after the wind had been upon them for several minutes.

"It is better than I expected," replied Danvers. "I feared a gale — and from the north."

Half an hour later Danvers spoke again. "It will blow stronger," he said. "There is a core to it. I felt it all day, and now I hear it."

A gray, ragged rift of dawn was breaking in front of their pitching jibboom when the thing which the master was watching for finally reached them. That the immense draft of wind which had been pressing them along for the last eight hours could increase in either weight or speed was a miracle to Drurie.

It fell upon them as solid as water, crushing the stout little hull deep into the eager sea, and then hurling her on her course like a plaything. Drurie was spun against the after-companion. He lay there for a minute, gripping at whatever he touched with hands and feet.

Danvers stooped and roared into his ear: "She'll weather it. She be too quick for the seas to override her. 'Twill blow itself out in an hour or two."

Drurie pulled himself to his feet and stood, clinging to the hutch of the companion, until the terror of this madness of wind and wave lifted from his spirit. He, too, had felt the nameless fear of the North. Then he went below.

As Danvers had said, the storm eased its fury within two hours of its supreme effort; but it continued to blow at half a gale until noon. Every member of the

brig's company felt a relaxing of strained nerves. Men whistled at their work, and the watch below, instead of sleeping, clustered about the break of the forecastle-head and sang madrigals and deep-sea chanties.

The adventurers aft lolled in the pale sunlight; and Cremona, feeling no need for his story, smoked a roll of tobacco and gave ear to Prowse's chatter about a girl in distant Devon. Drurie and the master went below and sank to dreamless slumber.

In the afternoon the brig passed a number of islands of naked rock, pink and purple in the failing light. An easy draft of wind drifted out of the north, and intense cold filled the air. The first mate, who was on duty, made all sail, eager to clear the Cape of God and win into the wide Atlantic before the ice should close the eastern gate of the passage. The men who had the deck put on their heaviest clothing, and great mittens of wool on their hands.

Next morning a thin edge of ice, about six inches wide, lay around the water-line of the brig. The wind still held from the north, quiet and steady as a current of icy water. The sea rolled gently, without a break of white, and the brig swept smoothly and silently along. Cape of God loomed ahead, crouched forward as if ready to hurl itself into the path of the little vessel.

The crew was set to breaking away the fringe of ice with poles and oars. The thin crystal shattered and vanished at a touch; and yet, grown a little thicker, it would support a running man, and a little thicker again it would stop the onward rush of a forging ship.

By sunset the *Brave Adventure* was abreast of the soaring cape. Danvers held her well up to the wind, away from the formidable wall and its hidden outposts, where white spray leaped from the smooth sea.

Before dawn a flurry of snow passed over the brig. This was followed by a fog, that only whitened a little as the hours passed. The gentlemen were at breakfast, with candles on the table and a lantern hanging steady from the deck-beam overhead, when Danvers entered the cabin, threw aside his cloak, and sat down.

"We are in the edge of slob ice," he said. "But it does not matter now. Even if it tightens around us, it is clear of any land, and will do no more than drift us southward a trifle. As we are well away from the coast of Labrador, that will do no harm."

"Heaven be thanked for letting us out of the narrow waters," said Drurie.

"Aye, praise be to His name," returned Danvers reverently. Then he ate heartily, drank deep, and

laughed and talked with the air of a man who has felt a great shadow slip from his spirit.

All day the fog shrouded them; the sails swelled for a moment from yard and stay only to flap and sag again; the thin fragments of ice, broken from some northern coast, knocked against the brig's sides and clung. In spite of the gloom, a spirit of serenity and security hung over the little vessel, soothing the hearts of her company.

Clear of threatening rocks and the northern fastnesses, with the wide ocean on every side, what mattered a few days of southward drifting in the mild bondage of this thin ice? The gentlemen played at cards in the warm, candle-lighted cabin; and even Drurie and Danvers felt free to take an occasional hand. And so the day passed, and the fog darkened from white to black again.

That night, a wonderful dream came to Francis Drurie. It was as if he opened his eyes from a deep sleep and looked between the curtains of his berth into his cabin. By the faint light of the lantern, hanging over the table, he saw a human figure standing, silent and dim as a shadow. Now, this inner cabin was his own, and even the master entered it only by his invitation.

He leaned upon his elbow and stared out, wondering

if one of his gentlemen had come to speak to him. But he could not make the figure out.

"Who is there?" he asked quietly.

At the first sound of his voice the figure moved toward him. It was a woman! It was Isobel!

"Do not fear," said the dear voice, of which not a tone had faded from his heart. "I have come, in my dream, to tell you that I still live and wait for you. The path to me, dearest, is one of duty well done, and bitter sufferings, and hoping against hope."

And then, in the silence that followed, the vision of the girl faded away. Drurie could not move or call her name. He struggled to get out of his berth, but it seemed that invisible barriers held him. At last, in the agony of his futile efforts, he opened his eyes. So — it was only a dream, after all. But what a dream! To Drurie, the hand of God was in it. He was not a man of prayer, but God was a very real Being to him. He slipped from his berth and thanked God on bended knees. The knowledge that bitter sufferings were to be his dimmed neither his gratitude nor his joy.

By morning the brig was firm in the grip of the drifting floe. Fog still shrouded the sea. Drurie's comrades saw the new light in his eyes, and wondered if he had suddenly forgotten his grief. He told of his

dream to Dick and Cremona, and both accepted the meaning of it without question. They found no difficulty in believing it to be a message, and so they rejoiced with their commander.

CHAPTER XX

DENIS ST. OVIDE DUVAL

It happened that a famous Canadian, known by the style and name of Captain Denis St. Ovide Duval, encountered the same fog-bank and the same ice-floe in which the *Brave Adventure* drifted blindly.

Duval was one of England's most exasperating tormentors in the north, from New England to Acadia and Newfoundland. In time of war he was a privateer, and in time of peace a pirate. English commerce was always his target. His delight was to strike a blow at the power of that lion-hearted little island, and, at the same time, fill his pockets with such treasure as the moth of pleasure and the rust of sea-winds destroy.

He was a strange mixture of soldier and ruffian, gentleman and knave. There was some mystery about his birth. He claimed kinship with several great families; but, whether because of his naval activities in times of peace or for another reason, he was avoided by the members of these same families. It was a well-known fact that the Admiral St. Ovide would

never invite him to so much as a glass of wine; and yet the two had fought their ships side by side against the forts of the harbour of St. John's. He was a strange fellow — a strange mixture. Those who wished to see only the bad blood in him could not ignore the good; and those who wished to see only the good were reminded, very frequently, of the bad. But whatever his faults in heart and breeding, he was a brave and brilliant commander and a capable navigator.

Denis St. Ovide Duval had heard of the new English post in the northern wilderness from a French trapper, and he had put a fine plan together. He would slip into that northern sea just as the armed ships of the Royal Company slipped out, and take the fort, and settle there comfortably for the winter. By spring he should have valuable cargoes for his two vessels and prisoners for Quebec, to say nothing of the glory of leaving a Canadian garrison in the fort and the French flag flapping above its walls. Surely, for such a service, the king could not do less than make him governor of all that vast wilderness, with a percentage from every pelt taken in trade there. Then he should have the laugh on his haughty cousin, the admiral.

With his head full of such fine intentions had Duval headed northward along the coast of Labrador at that

late season. Duller men might have waited for spring; but Duval was not dull. Yet the fog and the ice played him a trick.

Shortly after noon, just as the men of the *Brave Adventure* were returning their empty plates and cannikins to the galley, having fed well on pea soup and roasted vension, a brisk little wind sprang up in the west. The fog broke, lifted, and blew away — and there, not four hundred yards southward of the brig, lay two vessels in the grip of the ice.

Word of it was shouted into the cabin and the forecastle. In a twinkling every adventurer and mariner was on deck, gaping at the unexpected sight. The master looked for a moment and turned to Drurie with an expression of concern on his face.

"It is Duval, the Canadian," he said. "I've seen them before — aye, and run from them. He sails the schooner himself, and we call it the *Black Devil*. The little brigantine was an English craft once."

"Duval!" exclaimed the commander. "Lord, but 'twould be a fine thing to sink both his ships for him."

Danvers smiled without enthusiasm. "Aye, and a hard thing," he replied. "Both vessels are armed like war-ships. What I am thinkin' is, 'twould be a fine thing to be able to break out of this ice and show 'em our heels. Two to one makes rare good sport,

to my mind, with a good sailin' wind and a free keel; but plugged here in the ice, 'twill be nothing but gun-play. The ways of powder and shot are as Fate intended them, and a cannon fired by a fool shoots as far as one fired by a master-gunner; but pretty sailin' gives the ship and the master a chance to work together and confound the enemy."

"You are right," replied Drurie; "but, as we cannot do any fine sailing, as we did against Black Monk, we must do fine shooting. There is nothing else for it, if those ships in truth belong to Duval."

As yet, they could see no sign of life aboard the schooner and the brigantine. The guns of the *Brave Adventure* were cleared for action. Powder and ball, canister and grape, were carried up from the magazines, and the men went to their posts. They went to their posts laughing and joking, poor fellows, full-fed and afraid of no Frenchman under the sun. They did not give a thought to the fact that this fight was to be a simple and terrible matter of give and take, with the same broadsides belching all through, and no help from the wits and skill of Master Danvers and the speed and handiness of the brig.

The red ensign was run up; and, as if the halyards were hauled by the same hands, up went the white flag of France on both the enemies.

The brigantine lay side-on to the English brig, and the schooner, lying farther to the south and east, presented her bows to the brig's port bow. Northward, the ice ran silver and shining under the sun as far as the eye could see. To the west, east, and south it extended for only a mile or so, and lively little seas danced about the edges of it.

"I would the fog had not lifted," said Danvers earnestly.

As yet, no sign of life, beyond the flying of the flags, had appeared on either of the French ships. Drurie set his men to shifting the big guns. Two on the port broadside were moved forward and trained on the schooner, and the other two were run across the deck to reenforce the starboard battery. The swivels from the stern were hauled forward and mounted on the forecastlehead, beside the long bow-chaser. By this arrangement, six heavy pieces were brought to bear on the brigantine and three heavy pieces and the two swivels on the schooner. Many of the bales of pelts were thrown up from the hold and lashed round the batteries, inside the bulwarks.

Already the brief northern day was drawing to its close. A look of relief began to spread upon the master's broad face.

"There'll not be much damage done in the dark,"

he said, " and the floe may break by morning. Then, if ye want a fight, the little lady will make a pretty fight; and if ye want to get away, she'll flap her skirts at those water-logged, unhandy arks."

" I sincerely hope that the floe will break," replied Drurie; " but I am troubled now to know how I can keep the Frenchmen from crossing the ice during the night and boarding us. No doubt both ships are heavily manned."

" The first broadside will splinter the ice for yards on every side of us," answered the master. " They'll have to use their boats to come aboard us."

" Then the sooner we splinter a little ice the better," said Drurie.

He went to the forward battery and saw the gunners train their pets on the narrow bows of the schooner. Next moment, the five pieces crashed with a deafening report, and the brig surged backward and crumpled the ice for a yard or more under her stern. The smoke drifted over the deck, shutting the schooner off from the gunners' view.

Before the wind had blown it away, the reenforced battery to starboard crashed like one gigantic gun. Beneath that choking pall of smoke the men toiled frantically, swabbing and loading, though they expected the deadly tempest of the French reply at any

moment. The yards creaked, and the brig rocked in her basin of shattered ice. The smoke thinned; and at the very moment of the second discharge of the forward battery, the schooner and the brigantine sent their answers.

Two men were struck down by the canister from the brigantine, the capstan was hit by a round-shot from the schooner, and a great lump of oak and iron was hurled through the breast of one of the gunners.

For nearly an hour the battle raged, heroic, appalling, cruel. Then darkness silenced the guns. The *Brave Adventure* had suffered terribly. Young Prowse died as many another Prowse has died before and since this unrecorded battle in the northern ice.

Dick was wounded in the shoulder, seriously. Danvers's left arm was blown away at the elbow, Tizard lay stunned by a flying splinter, and Drurie had received two flesh-wounds. One of the master-gunners and nine of the crew lay dead, and five more were seriously torn or broken.

Cremona, who had worked in the most exposed places throughout the fight and yet had escaped without a scratch, now showed a useful knowledge of surgery. Assisted by Drurie, Duff, and the uninjured men, he cut and bathed and bandaged swiftly and tenderly. The wounded men were carried below. Rum was

served to all hands, and a hearty meal was eaten, the wounded men being fed by their more fortunate comrades. Then the sentries were posted for the first watch of the night.

The brig had suffered as terribly as her brave company. Her foremast was a wreck, her bulwarks were shattered, and two of her heavy guns were disabled. The forecastle was battered and splintered, and the bowsprit carried clean away. A dozen great shot were lodged in the stout timbers of her hull, and several had entered her hold dangerously near the waterline.

The men of the brig could not see what damage had been done to the French vessels. During the fight, the hanging smoke had allowed them but brief glimpses of their targets; and by the time the smoke had cleared, it was night. But they had reason to believe that the brigantine was in a bad state, for her fire had slackened by half before the end of the engagement. Fortunately, the night was dark and there was no moon.

Drurie's heart was all but broken by the death of Lawrence Prowse and his brave men, and the suffering of the wounded; and, for all his courage, he could see no hope for the morrow unless a strong wind rose in the night. Even with the ice broken, it was doubtful whether the brig would be able to escape from the schooner in her shattered condition. Unable to sleep,

he spent the whole night in wandering from one part of the brig to another, now pausing to ease the position, or give water, to one of the wounded, and again to speak a word of encouragement to the men still on duty.

To his own wounds he gave not a thought, though both were deep and painful. He had washed and bound them soon after the firing had ceased — and that was the last attention he had given them. But Dick's, Tizard's, and Danvers's injuries worried him beyond expression. He had carried Dick to his own berth in the inner cabin. Already, before midnight, the poor lad was delirious from the agony of shattered shoulder and bruised chest. Danvers, also, was growing light-headed from intense suffering, and Tizard still lay unconscious, breathing heavily. There was not a corner of the little vessel free from death or agony.

Drurie was standing on the forecastle-head, leaning on one of the cannon, with his face sunk on his folded arms, when he felt a hand on his shoulder.

"This very bad," said the voice of Cremona. "I don't smile at you crying, Frank, for I cry myself at this. I see plenty of men dead before now; but not men I love. Dick will die, I think. God, I love him like a mother and a father! Now, you let me tie your leg again."

But Francis Drurie would not hear of that. His leg was not hurting him. He had lost a pint or so of blood — that was all. He urged Cremona to lie down and try to get a few hours' sleep.

"No; I sleep soon enough for a very long time, perhaps," replied Cremona. "See, the wind is dead and the air is clear. Soon the sun will come up — and then we begin loading and firing again. No, Frank; we better stay awake now, for we all sleep soon enough, I think."

"As Heaven wills," replied Drurie quietly. "Better men than I am — and maybe as good men as you, Cremona — have died this way."

"You think me a good man, Frank?" asked Cremona earnestly.

"One of the best," answered Drurie shortly.

Cremona made no reply, but a fine elation of spirit went through him like fire. He had lived a hard life, and had been a low rogue in his time; but here was a fine ending. He had been born into the world among criminals and outcasts; and now he stood at the threshold of death, a gentleman among gentlemen, a worthy member of a gallant company.

Without another word the two parted, the heart of each warm with admiration and affection for the other. Drurie went into the forecastle to tend the

sufferers there, and Cremona hurried back to the wounded men in the cabin. Tizard passed away without a struggle, or without once having regained consciousness, an hour before dawn. Cremona and the commander stitched him in his canvas shroud with their own hands, with a round-shot at his feet. The thin ice, which had formed again since the guns had ceased their recoiling, shattered as he went through. Down he sank through the cold depths, to where his comrade Prowse and a brave company awaited him, all lying still and blind on the sea-floor, heedless of ambition or duty until the call to the last parade.

CHAPTER XXI

THE BRAVE ADVENTURE SUNK

A CLEAR dawn heralded the last day of that heroic but nameless battle. By the first light Drurie looked at his enemies in wonder. The white hull of the brigantine was shattered and stained with blood. Not one of her spars was standing, and she lay with a sharp list to starboard. The schooner was not so seriously injured, but her great foremast lay on the ice, cut clear, and her bows were riddled with shot holes.

Drurie called his men together.

"Lads," he said, "we have fought our guns and our ship bravely enough; but the odds were against us from the first, and are against us still. I speak to you honestly. I see no chance of our beating off these Frenchmen. We have done our duty. I am ready to fight again, or to surrender. What is your wish in the matter?"

"Let us fight," cried several of the men. "We'd better die fightin' than be hung to the yard-arm."

"Aye, sir, this here Duval don't care what he do to prisoners when he be in a temper," said the boatswain. "Let us fight it out, sir; and if we die — why, sir, we've all to come to it some day."

That suited every man aboard, sound and wounded. They had no desire for Canadian prisons, or for ending a good fight by kicking their heels at the end of a rope. Each man drank a measure of rum after his breakfast, and then went willingly but stolidly to his post.

The sun slid up, clear as glass, but without warmth. Such wind as there was crept cheerlessly out of the northwest, over miles of frozen sea. The air was bitterly cold. The cold alone was enough to chill the courage of brave men, but the lads of the brig stood to their guns and gazed unconcernedly across the glistening ice to the silent ships of the enemy. But those ships did not remain silent for long after the rising of the sun. The schooner reopened the battle with a discharge of grape that flew high. The brig replied with both her batteries, and the horrible fight was on again.

Through a rift in the cloud of smoke, Drurie saw men running away from the brigantine across the ice. Thinking they were preparing to board the brig, he swept them with canister. The survivors made all

speed to the schooner. They were not many. When the smoke thinned again the brigantine had vanished, and only a pool of gray, dancing water was where she had been.

The last charge of powder aboard the *Brave Adventure* had been fired. She was settling steadily by the head. Drurie wiped the blood from his eyes and looked round him. He saw a few men leaning listlessly against the silent guns, and many sprawled upon the deck. The fight was over — and lost. Again blood trickled into his eyes. Then he saw Cremona, and felt him press something into place upon his forehead and tie a cloth around it. Without a word he turned and walked aft, scarcely knowing what he was about. In the cabin he found both Dick and Danvers dead. He touched their cold calm faces with his hands.

He saw Cremona enter, kneel beside Dick's body and fling his arms forward. He heard the big man weep. He turned away and went on deck; and close beside the stump of the mainmast he stumbled over Duff's lifeless body. What were these strange beings clustering about him, with blood and sweat and powder-stains on their grotesque faces? Ah! They were his own men — his own brave lads! There was Nicholas, with a bandage of sodden cloth over half his face.

"DUVAL'S DARK FACE WAS FLUSHED WITH ANGER."

He counted them slowly. Ten! Yes, ten was all he could make of them, and three were on their hands and knees.

"Lads," he said, "the fight is finished."

He drew his sword and tried to break it across his knee; but the good blade was too tough for his nerveless muscles.

"Let me do it," said Cremona. So he broke his commander's sword, and then his own, and tossed the bright pieces into the scuppers. At that moment Duval and twenty of his Canadians climbed over the side of the *Brave Adventure*.

Duval's dark face was flushed with anger. He glared at Cremona.

"Do you surrender?" he asked.

"This gentleman is the commander," said Cremona, indicating Drurie.

"Well, my fine little cock, have you had enough?" cried the Canadian.

This manner of address cleared Drurie's brain.

"I am ready to give myself and my men up to Captain Duval, but not to his boatswain," he said.

"I am Captain Denis St. Ovide Duval," replied the other, more gently.

"A man of honourable family, I have heard. Well, sir, I surrender Captain Cremona, my men, and

myself to you as prisoners of war," said Drurie. His clear blue eyes gazed steadily and fearlessly upon the Canadian, with a light in them that was enough to shame the devil himself.

It shamed Duval, whom no bluster could disconcert. It appealed to that better part of his nature that came to him from hundreds of valiant men and beautiful women. He turned to the men behind him and spoke to them swiftly, for a little while, in the French tongue.

Four of the Canadians began to lead the survivors of the crew of the *Brave Adventure* across the deck, two by two. They carried those who were unable to walk. They lowered them all into a boat that lay among the broken ice under the brig's side. Drurie and Cremona were not disturbed.

Duval stood beside them giving orders to the main body of the force he had brought aboard with him. The cabin was looted, and bale after bale of the costly furs were brought up from the hold. The brig now was deep in the water, and sharply sunk by the head. All the schooner's boats were around her, having been dragged across the ice and launched into the narrow strip of water. As quickly as they were freighted from the brig's cargo they were pulled to the solid ice, unloaded and pulled back. A shiver passed through the crippled brig, fore and aft. Duval shouted to

his men, and those below quickly scrambled on deck.

" Come, gentlemen," he said to Drurie and Cremona.

Drurie was helped down into one of the boats, for now his wounds were stiffening. All the boats were pushed quickly to the ice and pulled out upon the glistening surface. A sound like a sigh came from the wounded and deserted brig, and every one turned to look at her. She swayed gently in her narrow sea-bed. Her sunken bows seemed to lift a little, then pitched deep. The high poop, with its wide ports and gilded scroll-work, soared aloft. Left by an oversight of Duval's, the red ensign flapped on the stump of the mainmast. Amid a roaring and surging of waters the *Brave Adventure* pitched down to her deep-sea grave. A few shattered and blood-stained timbers leaped up and floated on the surface of the ice-rimmed pool.

A surgeon aboard the schooner dressed the wounds of Drurie and the other prisoners. They were lowered into the hold, after the bales of furs. All who were not disabled by their injuries were put in irons. The hold was warm — that is, the amidships part of it, where the prisoners lay. The schooner had not suffered anywhere but in her bows. Two lanterns hung from the deck-beams, and made blurs in the yellow gloom. They

were of no use to see by, but they cheered the eyes and held back the darkness.

Soon after the dressing of their wounds Drurie and his companions fell into the dreamless sleep of utter exhaustion. Only their wrists were shackled, so they could lie comfortably in any position that suited their aching limbs.

Drurie was awakened by the touch of a hand on his shoulder.

"What is it?" he asked sleepily, thinking himself in his berth aboard the *Brave Adventure*.

A bowl of broth was placed in his manacled hands. Then he remembered everything; but he also remembered the vision that had come to him in the cabin of the brig. By the dull glow of the lanterns he could make out the figure of a man stooped beside him. His stomach yearned for the broth which he held in his hands.

"Are my men fed?" he asked.

"All are drinking the good soup, save one who died while you slept," replied the voice of the surgeon, in English.

"Who has died?" asked Drurie.

"It be poor Hipwood has passed away, sir," said one of the men.

Drurie drank his broth, which was rich and warm,

to the last drop and the last grain of barley. The French surgeon continued to crouch beside him, his imagination captivated by the courage and fortitude of this slender young Virginian.

One of the men had told him of the way he had received Duval aboard the sinking brig — proud, cool, and fearless. The surgeon was a good deal of a coward himself, but he thought courage one of the highest attributes of human and animal nature. He was a student of men, and fearlessness in the face of danger was one of the things he could not understand. The recklessness of rage he counted a small matter. It was the reasoning courage of such men as Drurie and his companions that attracted and puzzled him. Now he waited, in silence, beside the young Virginian, until the bowl was empty. Then he took it from the manacled hands.

"The ice is breaking away," he said. "We may be clear of it by morning. We are drifting southward and westward fast."

"And what is the time of day?" asked Drurie.

"It is now about three hours since sunset," replied the surgeon. "The carpenters have been hard at work since noon, patching the hull and superstructure and setting up a new spar forward. Your guns did terrific damage, captain."

"They did what they could," said Drurie. And then: "You talk like an Englishman," he added.

"That is not to be wondered at," replied the surgeon, "as I have lived in both England and one of her western colonies. My mother was an Englishwoman, and I was brought up, as a child and youth, by her relatives. Later I lived for several years in New England. But my heart was French all the while; and, in time, I followed my heart. But tell me of yourself, captain."

"There is little to tell," said Drurie, with a note of bitterness — or was it only weariness — in his voice. "I am a Virginian. I have fought against the savages there, and I have sailed on two voyages to Hudson Bay as commander of the *Brave Adventure* — the brig that sank to-day. And here I am, sir. It is a fine history."

"It is a brave history," replied the surgeon.

Francis Drurie lay wide-awake through that long night, with a thousand scenes passing and repassing across the boundless field of his inner vision. It was as if he watched a play upon a stage as wide as earth and heaven.

He saw the Virginian forests, the lodges of the savages, and the weather-stained militiamen beside whom he had ridden and fought. Again he saw the

autumn groves through which he had returned to Admiral's Pride; and again he heard Isobel's song, and overtook her in the path. He lived through that wonderful time again — the night of the ball and the day after.

Men of Bristol flocked across his vision, and insignificant scraps of conversations with Smithers, the merry merchant, flashed clear in his memory. Again he and Dick and Cremona travelled in Spain together; and now Dick lay under the gray ice, and Cremona slept here in the hold of the French schooner, with irons on his great wrists.

Minute by minute his brain went over every incident of the terrible battle, sparing him nothing, showing him again the blood, the leaping splinters, the falling spars, and the limp bodies of his friends and comrades. He wanted to sleep — to forget the horror, and dream only of Virginia and Isobel. But his brain was too active for sleep. Outraged by the events of the last two days, it had got beyond control of his will. After it had reviewed the past, it turned fearfully to the future.

What was to become of them? Did Duval intend to sail straight to Quebec, and imprison them there, or would he take them to some French harbour in Newfoundland or to France?

At last Drurie crawled over and awoke Cremona.

"I cannot sleep," he whispered. "My brain is on fire. Let us talk for a little while."

"I was dreaming. We were in the little lugger again — you and Dick and I — sailing along in the sunshine over that blue water," said Cremona.

"No, do not talk of those things," pleaded Drurie. "They are what spin in my mind until I can stand no more. Tell me of things and people I do not know — not of the things I have known and lost."

"I will tell you of an old man who was good to me long ago, when I was a little boy," said Cremona; and he told of his first voyage, and of an old boatswain who used to share his food with him, and comfort him when others were cruel, and tell him wonderful stories.

Cremona went on from speaking of the boatswain to reciting some of those long-forgotten tales. Drurie listened eagerly. Cremona's voice was low and steady. Drurie's eyelids closed, and opened quickly. Yes, he had heard this story before, long ago, from his mother. How strange and comforting it was to hear Cremona telling it. Again his eyes closed. And when the men in the forecastle were just beginning to stir, and the watch on deck was looking eastward at the dawn, Drurie's tired brain fell asleep.

The surgeon appeared early in the prisoners' quar-

ters, with a man behind him carrying food and drink.

He found that another of the wounded Englishmen had died in the night. He awoke Drurie and Cremona, who were sleeping soundly side by side. His assistant aroused the others, and all fell heartily to the business of eating. But one of the men suddenly became uneasy and began to feel about in the darkness with his feet.

"Wake up, Jim," he cried. "Ye was feelin' better last night. Wake up, now, an' try a snack o' this here salt junk."

"My lad, your friend is dead," said the surgeon. "He was more than half dead when he was brought aboard. But the rest of you will live, I think."

The fellow who had called his friend to wake up and eat trembled violently. A chill passed over the little company, as if a cold wind had blown upon them.

"Is it Jim Hawkins who is gone now?" asked Drurie.

"Aye, sir, it be Jim Hawkins — him that beat us all at the broadsword play at the fort," said one of the men.

"He was a good lad," said Drurie. "He never shirked his duty, and he died without a cry. He'll rest easy, lads, and go to a sure reward."

The men returned to their food without any more

talk. Death had lost much of its awesomeness in their eyes of late. It did not seem such a terrible matter, after all, here in the hold of the French schooner, among the drifting ice. Neither life nor death seemed a thing worth troubling about now. Poor old Jim! Well, he was past suffering now, and perhaps well clear of what was to come. More than one of those brave fellows envied the dead man in their hearts.

CHAPTER XXII

UNSUSPECTED FATE

On the day of Hawkins's death, and after the body had been carried up and pitched into the sea, Captain Duval himself descended into the hold. He had been in a terrible temper up to this time; and so, wishing to appear a man of breeding in Drurie's eyes, had kept away from his prisoners.

From the point of view of a pirate, he had reason to feel bad-tempered; for he had lost a vessel and forty men, and his plans for the winter were knocked to ruins, all for about a thousand pounds' worth of booty and a handful of prisoners. And the English fort in the wilderness stood unharmed, flying its red ensign at the winter winds.

All this was a sorry blow to the Canadian's pride as well as to his pocket. But he regained control of his temper before going into the hold, anxious to convince the pale young gentleman in irons that he, too, was a gentleman.

Duval carried an extra lantern with him, and squatted

on a bale of skins beside Drurie and Cremona. "I hope you have been comfortable here," he said, as if he had entertained honoured guests in his best bedchamber. "And I hope you have had sufficient food."

"You have treated us with exceptional kindness, and I thank you for it in all our names," replied the Virginian.

Duval was flattered by this. "Some commanders would not have been so considerate," he said. "But Denis St. Ovide Duval is a gentleman. Brave himself, he respects brave men — even if they have sunk one of his ships and killed forty of his mariners."

"We did what we could, captain," replied Drurie quietly. "With sea room, I doubt not but that we should have sent both your vessels to the bottom and killed eighty of your men."

"Not so fast!" cried Duval. Then he laughed, for he had a sense of humour. "You are outspoken, captain. Your spirit is amazing high."

"I speak what I think — and my spirit is as Heaven made it."

"'Tis so with all of us. So gentlemen of distinguished family are made. But your friend here, Captain Cremona, says nothing."

"When I talk," said Cremona, "I talk to a purpose.

Will you tell me how things are doing up in daylight, Captain Duval?"

"The ice has spread," replied the Canadian, "and we are sailing southward very pleasantly, though our rigging is not what it was."

"May I ask what you intend to do with us?" inquired Drurie.

"That I cannot tell you at present," said Duval politely. "I have not yet decided. If St. John's were not in the hands of the English again, I'd land you there. If I were bound for Quebec, I'd take you to the governor there; but I am not. As it is, I cannot say what I shall do with you; but you may be sure that while you are in my hands you shall be treated with every consideration due to prisoners of war."

Then he went away before they could ask him any more questions.

Within a half-hour of his visit, a small measure of fine brandy was served to each of the prisoners.

"I think this Duval an honest fellow," said Francis to Cremona.

Cremona swallowed the last drop of his brandy before replying. Then he said: "I think he has an honest side to him — and another side that is not so honest. He is gentleman now — rogue to-morrow. That is what I hear. He had something bad in his

brain even while he talked to us so polite. I could see it behind his eyes, by the lantern-light. I think this Duval cares greatly for you to think him all gentleman now; but when you no longer have your eye on him, then he not give a hang what you think. He is a vain fellow, but he knows his betters."

"He spoke us fairly enough, and has treated us well," replied Drurie.

"I fear, Frank, you will hear him speak another tune one day," returned Cremona. "The gentleman in him will be weaker than the rogue one fine day — and then you will want to break his head."

"We must take a little trouble to humour him, my friend," said Drurie.

The wounded prisoners regained strength day by day. Fortier, the surgeon, attended to their injuries with honest care, and was proud of the success that crowned his work. Only young Nicholas, Drurie's servant, seemed to hang in the wind in the matter of recovery. His wound had not been more severe than the wounds of others; but his courage failed him at thought of a French prison, and a slow fever thinned his blood.

Now, the hatch overhead was often removed, and left off throughout the heat of the day, letting the fresh wind renew the air and lift the gloom of the hold.

At the first sight of the blue sky and the white clouds driving over, hope awoke in the heart of every man of that shackled company. Even Nicholas opened his eyes and took some interest in the things of the present. As for the others — why, it was like morning after a night of despair.

They had almost become convinced that the whole world was dark, faintly lit by the flames of two tallow-dips in tin lanterns. They had all but forgotten that winds blow and sails are spread on lively yards and clouds voyage across the dome of heaven. For days they had been nothing more than dreamers of dull dreams. Now, in a twinkling, they were living sailors again. They began to talk of gay things they had done, at one time and another, and even to make light of French prisons.

Captain Duval did not visit them again; but on the fourteenth day, after the schooner had got clear of the ice, he sent word for Drurie to come to the cabin.

It was Fortier who brought the message and helped the Virginian to the deck, by way of a passage that led into the forecastle and up an iron ladder to the brisk and sunlit world above. The men of the schooner eyed Drurie with interest — even with admiration — as he walked aft, with his shackled hands and white, fearless face.

At the door of the inner cabin the surgeon left him.

An armed mariner opened the door for Drurie, followed him into the cabin, and closed the door. The ports stood open, admitting a draft of wind, a wavering radiance of sunlight, and the sibilant complaining of the schooner's wake. On the locker under the open ports lolled Duval — ruddy, black-haired, and black-eyed — and garbed midway between the style of a French gentleman and a pirate.

"Place a seat for Captain Drurie," he commanded, without rising.

Drurie sat down heavily on the stool that was pushed against the back of his legs by the armed mariner.

"Another glass on the table, Pierre. And now you may withdraw to the other side of the door," said the Canadian.

Left alone with his prisoner, Duval sat up and pushed a bottle across the table. "It is good wine, from the lazaretto of your own unfortunate brig, I believe," he said. "Help yourself, captain."

Drurie flushed quickly and lifted his hands above the edge of the table, so that the short chain between the bracelets of iron clanked against the bottle. "I must trouble you, I fear," he said.

"A thousand pardons," cried Duval, rising quickly. He did not strike off the irons, however, but contented

himself with pouring wine for the Virginian and then for himself.

Drurie felt faint. He raised his glass clumsily in both manacled hands and emptied it at a gulp.

Duval smiled and refilled the glass. Then he returned to his lolling position on the locker.

"Captain Drurie," he said, "I have given a great deal of thought to the case of you and your companions, and also to the losses I have suffered at your hands. The cargo and stores of your brig did not repay one-fifth of my losses. I must try to recover what I can. You understand, captain, that I do not work altogether for glory. I am a poor man, and must look sharp to the doubloons. But I do not blind myself to the rights and feelings of others."

"I believe you," replied Drurie quietly. "You speak honestly, and have treated me with more consideration than I expected at your hands."

Duval leaned across the table and refilled the other's glass.

"Well, sir," he continued, "I cannot carry you to Quebec, as I told you before; and I should be sorry to do so, anyway. I am sailing to the islands to the south of St. Kitt's, to see if I cannot pick up a prize or two in those waters. And I have a proposition — a suggestion — to make to you."

Drurie nodded and looked at him hopefully. What now?

"I honour your spirit and that of your big friend and your men," continued the Canadian. "It lost me a good ship, forty stout lads, and a deal of stores; but I honour it, for all it has cost me. Never have I seen such fighting as that of your little brig.

"To show my admiration, I now offer you a position as my lieutenant and berths for your friend and your eight men. It is freedom I offer you, and membership in a brave company. When you have served with me a year, if you or any of your men are then anxious to leave me, I will set you ashore near some English settlement."

"I thank you for your offer," replied Drurie. "No doubt, you mean it kindly. But serving you for a year means preying upon my own country for a year. For myself, I refuse the offer. My comrades are free to do as they please in the matter."

"You do not ask of the alternative?" said Duval, smiling.

"No matter what the alternative may be, I reject your offer," said the Virginian, his blue eyes shining as cold as ice.

"You speak bravely," said the Canadian. "But listen, Captain Drurie. Those who cannot serve me,

and so earn their freedom in an easy and pleasant manner, must be sold to some sugar-planter in the southern islands. Do you know the meaning of that? A white slave leads a hard life. One had better row in a Turkish galley than work in the fields of a West Indian plantation. Your courage is magnificent. 'Tis a pity to think of it breaking, day by day, under the whips of half-caste drivers."

"I see my duty plain," replied Drurie promptly. "I cannot turn my hand against the ships of my own people. What is fighting for you would be nothing but black murder for me. The blood on my hands would not be blood of my enemies, but of my fellow countrymen. I will work and die on any plantation under the sun rather than desert the service in which my fathers have fought and won glory. I cannot forget that I am a Virginian gentleman."

"It is a pity," said Duval. "I think you are pig-headed."

Poor young Drurie smiled faintly. This was certainly an unusual name for loyalty. Then a thought came to him that awoke hope in him again. How gladly his father would pay money to save him and his comrades from the fate that threatened them! And that money was what Duval wanted was plain as a pikestaff.

"My father is rich and generous," he said. "I offer you a hundred pounds for each one of my little company — a thousand pounds in all. My home is in Virginia; and I promise you, on the word of a gentleman, that the money shall be paid to you the very day you put us ashore in that country. And you shall be allowed to get safely away again."

Duval shook his head. "I am sorry to seem disobliging," he replied, "but I do not think it would be wise for me to land you in Virginia. That is a dangerous coast. A thousand pounds do not cover the risks — even if your generous father should consider it worth his while to pay so much for what he had already recovered."

He smiled slyly, emptied his glass, and refilled it.

"I answer for my father's honour," cried Drurie. "He will pay double that sum of money, and let you go as free as the wind. Yes, I promise you two thousand pounds!"

"The coast of Virginia is not a safe place for Captain Duval in his crippled schooner," replied the Canadian. "I have sighted three English war-ships in those waters in one day's run. I fear that the money would be of small use to me if I went there to get it."

"Then land us somewhere near New England," cried Drurie. "You may be sure that the money will

be sent to you as soon as I can communicate with my father. Come, captain! Two thousand pounds make a goodly bag of money."

Duval shrugged his shoulders. "Bah! You are brave, my friend — and you are simple. But I am not a fool! Say no more of your generous father."

He rapped sharply on the table with his knuckles. The armed sailor opened the door and came to Drurie's side.

"I am sorry that you are so pig-headed, Captain Drurie," said Duval.

"And I am sorry that you will not accept my word for the money," said Drurie, staring haughtily at the big Canadian.

The guard led him away, back to his manacled comrades in the dark hold. One by one the rest of the survivors of the *Brave Adventure's* crew were taken to Duval and offered membership in the schooner's company.

Every one of them, except a lad named Stark, gave the same answer that their commander had given. After that there were nine prisoners in the hold instead of ten.

As the schooner drew farther southward, the air in the hold became almost unbearable. The stench of the bilge awash only a few feet below them tortured

even their seasoned nostrils. For a week the schooner rolled idly in the doldrums. In such weather not so much as a breath of wind came down to the prisoners through the open hatch.

One night Drurie crawled under the square eye of the hatch and lay flat on his back, gazing upward. A touch of fever was in his blood. He counted the large, indifferent stars over and over, trying thus to win sleep to smarting eyelids and oblivion to aching brain and body. Despair came instead.

For the first time since the sinking of the brig, his courage failed him utterly. He groaned, and raised his hands to his face; and in the movement the chain that held wrist to wrist fell heavily across his chin. At that, sudden anger revived his spirit. He sat up and stared into the dark.

"Lads," he cried, "we are not beaten so long as there is life in us. But Stark! Stark is in a worse plight than the dead men under the ice! These dogs will sell us to lesser dogs — and these irons will be struck from us so that we may work in the fields. Strengthen your hearts for that day, lads — there'll be cold iron in our hands then instead of on our wrists."

When Drurie awoke, the sudden tropic morning was aflare across the square of the hatchway. That day the schooner won clear of the regions of calm.

All her sails were spread to the steady wind, and she lay over with a bar of white foam under her forefoot and the furrows of her wake diverging far astern.

Duval had the captives brought on deck for an airing. A healthy slave brings a better price than a sick one. They sat forward, in the shade of the headsails, and drank in the glitter and swing of wind and sea. The rush of waters along the driving hull, the vision of straining canvas, and the smell of pitch melting in the seams revived hope in their courageous breasts.

They remembered with a glow of pride what a great fight they had made against fearful odds; and the certainty grew in their hearts that they should fight again. Those who could moved up and down the deck; and the homely sights of shipboard — the smoking galley, the captain's wash flying from a line, and the fellow aloft in a boatswain's chair scraping the maintopmast — awoke the zest of life in them. The Frenchmen grinned at them, and gave them tobacco and lime-juice. Some of them showed their wounds to the English with the greatest good-humour. They seemed to recall the desperate battle only as a joke.

Throughout the remainder of the voyage the prisoners were allowed to take an airing on the deck every day. Also, they were well treated in the matter of food and drink. But Duval kept away from them. He did not

feel quite at ease when Drurie was looking at him. The surgeon continued to tend such of the prisoners as required his services. Soon the wounds were all healed, and Nicholas, with his fever, was the only man on the sick-list.

The schooner won to that fairy sea. Every day new landfalls were made. Dolphins flashed about her bows, and the blue water astern was cut by low, black trysails, the dorsal fins of sharks, cruising back and forth. Flying-fish broke from the waves in silver showers, skimmed away until they were but specks against the blue, and splashed again into the waves. The schooner crowded away from every sail she sighted. Once she ran so close to a little French island that the men could count the red roofs of a village nestled between the seaward palms and the timbered shoulders of the mountain-cone. They could see brown children at play on the lilac sand.

CHAPTER XXIII

ISOBEL LOOKS FROM HER WINDOW

Captain Denis St. Ovide Duval anchored his schooner outside the reef of the little island of Madiana and signalled for the *don* to come aboard. They were supposed to be on friendly terms, this lawless Canadian and this nameless Spaniard. For all that, the *don* would not trust himself aboard the schooner. So Duval, accompanied by one of his officers and four armed men, went ashore. The *don* received him with many signs of a delight which he did not feel. To tell the truth, he was afraid of the Canadian.

"I have nine white slaves for you," said Duval. "Two gentlemen and seven seamen. Do you want them, my friend?"

"And why not? I am short of hands. Of what breed are they?" replied the *don*. He would have bought the Frenchman's windlass or his spare set of sails if asked — anything to humour the dangerous fellow and get him speedily away from the island.

"One is a Spaniard, or something of that kind.

The others are English to a man," replied Duval insolently.

The proprietor of the island paid no attention to the note of insolence in the other's voice and manner. "Send for them, captain. Bring them ashore and let me glance them over," he cried as if he could scarcely contain his delight at the prospect of buying prisoners from the Canadian.

Yet he knew that he would have to pay a heavy price for the fellows. Yes, a heavy price. Had he known how heavy, I think he would have given Duval all his fortune to carry them away.

Irons were put on the prisoners' legs for the first time, and they were brought ashore. The *don* glanced them over with a sinister smile. He was wishing that Duval was one of them.

He walked up to Cremona. "You are a Spaniard," he said.

"You are a liar," replied Cremona. "I am an English gentleman."

The *don* drew back as if he had been stung. "You'll die for that," he cried. "Your great carcass will rot in the sun for that, you fool."

Duval and his fellows laughed long and loud. "Yes, he is a gentleman, whatever country bred him," said the Frenchman. "Two of them are men of

breeding, as I told you. I had no trouble with them, for I know how to treat gentlemen. It is a pity you do not understand the breed."

The *don* found that a hard mouthful to swallow, but he swallowed it.

Isobel closed the lower shutters of her window and peeped out between the slats at the pitiful procession that came slowly up from the sand. She had been watching the schooner for some time and the men on the shore, wondering if the visit of this fine craft would bring any change in her dreary life. As the strangers came nearer, and she saw that the main body of them were ironed at wrist and leg, she understood the reason of the schooner's visit, and her heart sank.

The procession passed close to the front of the house. Isobel looked down upon the ragged, weary fellows as they toiled along through the beating sunlight. Suddenly her attention was caught by the gallant, familiar bearing of one of the shackled men. A low cry escaped her — and, as if he had heard the cry, the man looked up. She gazed down, horror-stricken, into the face of her lover — into the thin, undaunted face of Francis Drurie. Then a cloud of fire surged across her vision.

Isobel recovered her senses quickly. At that moment

her uncle entered the room. He came close to her and took her roughly by the arm.

"I want you to keep out of sight until that schooner gets her anchor up," he whispered. "She is a French pirate. Her captain is now in the dining-room. If he catches sight of you — why, you will wish that you were still living quietly with me."

The girl promised to keep out of the pirate's sight. Alcazardo left her after a final warning to keep to her room and not to open the shutters of her windows. Then she threw herself down upon the bed and wept.

What was she to do? She knew to what a place her lover had been brought, but her heart told her that it would be dangerous to let him know of her presence on the island or to let her uncle suspect Drurie's identity. She prayed the knowledge be kept from him. To what depths of torture it might inspire him, his own black heart alone could say. After the storm of tears, her mind was clear. She saw that she must now work cunningly and swiftly toward Alcazardo's overthrow.

She realized that she could not disclose her presence to her lover, until the *don's* power was broken, without danger to his life. He would spring upon the fellow, bent upon her rescue, and die miserably and uselessly. Her most terrible fear was that the *don* might learn

that one of his new slaves was none other than Francis Drurie, the Virginian. Perhaps he already knew it. Her mind tortured her with suppositions as to what the monster would do in such a case.

He would see, in a flash, the end of his dream — a dream which the girl had artfully encouraged — of going back to Virginia some day and living the life of a prosperous, godly gentleman. If he thought that she had not seen her lover, might he not kill him immediately, and so look to stand as firmly in her favour then as before? What a thought! Again, if he knew that the girl had seen the Virginian, he would have no more use for her. She trembled at thought of what her fate might be.

In the dining-room Duval and the *don* drank wine and bartered. At last the *don* paid over the exorbitant sum demanded by the Canadian for the nine prisoners. Then he began to ask questions.

"What ship did these fellows belong to?" he asked.

Now, there was no reason in the world why Duval should not tell the Spaniard what he knew of the truth, but, not liking the fellow, his first thought was to lie to him.

"They came out of a brig I captured off the coast of Newfoundland," he said. "You will find them

hardy lads. And two of them, as I have told you, are gentlemen."

"And what are the names of those two?" asked the *don*.

"Bah! What do I know of the names of my prisoners?" replied Duval.

"Slaves require no names," agreed the *don*.

He poured more wine for his guest and himself. He was in a great hurry to get the Canadian out of the house, for the fellow had an uncomfortable way of staring at the box from which he had just been paid for the slaves, and of looking at the silver on the sideboard with calculating eyes. By the time Duval was ready to go back to his ship the *don* had forgotten the mild curiosity he had once entertained regarding the names of the men he had bought for so much good gold.

At last the schooner got her anchor up and slipped away, out of sight of the thankful Spaniard and the Island of Madiana. She ran down the narrow sea between the soaring cones of Martinique and Dominica, and southward, still past island-holdings of Spain, France, England, and Holland. There she gathered easy spoil; and all the while her commander planned a brave return against his old enemies in the smoky seas of the north. But on his way to the north he

would stop at a certain small, unprotected island and see what the *don's* fortune was worth. No doubt the yellow-faced old devil had the price of more than one good ship hidden away.

To the survivors of the *Brave Adventure* the change from Duval's schooner to the *don's* island did not seem at first to be a change for the better. The *don* was full of cruelty. He gave his mind to the practice of causing pain, as another man would to some absorbing sport. He conceived the torture to suit the particular case in hand, considering the temperament and constitution of his victims with scientific nicety. His slaves stood in such terror of him that fear hid their hatred, even from themselves. He filled every day of their miserable lives with such a dread and apprehension that many of them, seeing no other way of escape, opened for themselves the door of death. If the victim in such a case happened to be old, feeble, or diseased, the word of his self-destruction was received by the *don* with every sign of satisfaction; but if, on the other hand, the suicide had been a valuable slave, he fell into the most furious transports of temper. On such an occasion he had gone so far as to have one of his trusted overseers tied up and flogged. The *don* promised himself a deal of diversion at the expense of his new English slaves. As they were of a proud and courageous race,

and the children of generations of freemen, subtle cruelty would not be lost upon them. As for his other white slaves — why, like the blacks, they had become so dispirited that they could only be aroused to suffering by physical pain. But this new importation? Ah! he would flay their pride as well as their backs. He would crush them to the soil; break their manhood; set their natures back a thousand years.

The wrists of the new slaves were freed, but the irons were kept on their legs. They were given wide hats of native straw, with the crowns filled with leaves so that the sun would not strike them dead. They were driven like cattle down a track, between bananas and plantains, to a hillside field of young canes. Each was given a hoe, of unwieldy shape and extraordinary weight, and was directed by fierce gestures to pulverize the sun-baked clods of soil about the plants.

Drurie set an example manfully, and the others followed it, determined to make the best of a bad business for just so long as it was necessary. While their beloved captain worked, they would work; and when he fought, they would fight. They suffered as much from his wounds and his weariness as from their own.

After two hours of steady work, the lad, Nicholas, reeled and fell. An overseer shouted at him and

cracked the knotted, rawhide lash of his whip. Poor Nicholas tried to regain his feet; tried to pick up the hoe, only to fall again on hands and knees, and so crouch helpless, close to the warm earth. The overseer cursed furiously.

Stepping past several of the other labourers, who had paused in their work to gaze in pity and dismay at their fallen comrade, he laid his whip, full-swung, across the panting body. Nicholas flinched and groaned. The fellow flung the whip back for another blow; but before he could administer it, Drurie had him by the throat, and all the new slaves were jumping toward him on their shackled feet. He let fall the whip, tore himself clear of the choking fingers, and fled.

The *don's* new slaves spent that night on an earthen floor, chained to the timbers of a foul hut. Young Nicholas was in a raging fever. He rolled from side to side, muttered continuously, and pulled at his shackles. Despair and madness were in that black hut; and death lurked without in the sickening, black night, where a mulatto driver squatted with a musket across his knees.

But Drurie's courageous soul was able to derive some hope from the horrors of the past day. It seemed to him that either death or a more desirable form of

freedom must soon be theirs, for already every man of them had tasted the lash, and they had all openly attacked their taskmaster. This spirit meant a change of some kind — perhaps death, perhaps freedom. And why not freedom?

Surely these other slaves that he had seen suffering in the fields were ready to rise! A sudden attack, a quick death for some, and life for more. And then, if he were fortunate enough to be one of the living, the search for Isobel and her uncle. He recalled the fact that one of the overseers had come but slowly to help subdue the revolt of the morning, and that, though he had snapped his whip diligently enough, he had not struck any of the slaves. There was hope in that, surely.

If that overseer could be won to his side, it would be no great matter to put an end to the *don's* reign on the island. Then he remembered the vision that had come to him aboard the *Brave Adventure*. With hope firm in his heart, he at last fell asleep. He did not know how long he had been unconscious, when a light touch on his shoulder awoke him. He felt that some one stooped close to him.

"Who's there?" he whispered.

"Hush," came the guarded reply.

He felt a hand on his shoulder and the rim of a cool

cup against his lips. He drank eagerly; but the cup was not held straight, and as much of the water spilled over his chin and breast as passed down his parched throat. But it felt delicious wherever it touched him. At last the sweet cup was withdrawn.

"Who are you?" he whispered. The impact of a light, soft-shod foot sounded twice on the earthen floor. He turned on his side and listened.

There was only a sound of quiet breathing in the dark. Even Nicholas had ceased his restless muttering. The silence of peace filled the black hut as if an angel had soothed it.

In the garden, on the other side of the wall from the hut and the yard, two persons whispered together.

One was Isobel, the supposed daughter of the *don;* the other was Laroche, the half-caste overseer whom the *don* had once flogged.

"When the fight is well begun, they will all be brave enough; but they fear the *don* worse than the devil himself," said Laroche.

"It must be planned for the night after to-morrow," whispered the lady. "You and Valois will offer to take the places of the guards. Give them rum and a little of this money."

Then they parted. The girl moved toward the house. Laroche returned through the gate in the wall.

CHAPTER XXIV

A PLEASANT TIME BEFORE BREAKFAST

VERY early in the morning, before any food was served to them, the nine new slaves were lined up in the enclosed yard in front of the hut in which they had spent the night. The two overseers who marshalled them had pistols in their belts as well as whips in their hands. Laroche was not one of the two. Nicholas was in the line, leaning weakly against one of his comrades. Now and then a leg-iron clanked. Otherwise, the slaves and their guards waited in silence — the slaves waiting for they knew not what. Over one wall they saw the green crests of palms and the red-tiled roof of the house. Over another loomed the stone tower of the windmill. A draft of sea air came fanning down to them, and their hearts sickened with longing for deck and spar.

A door in the wall, over which the palms could be seen, opened suddenly, and the *don* stepped into the yard. He was dressed in loose white linen, a hat of native straw, and a sash of red silk around his waist.

On his bare feet he wore heelless slippers of straw. He halted a few paces from the prisoners and looked them over with deliberate menace. Every man of them, save Nicholas, met the black eyes fearlessly. Nicholas, poor lad, was not even aware of the *don's* presence.

The Spaniard stared at Drurie with what seemed exaggerated intentness, as if with his glance alone he would force the younger and smaller man to some show of weakness or fear. But in the clear blue eyes and thin face he saw a spirit that challenged and scorned him. He turned to the fellow whose throat had been endangered by Drurie's fingers, and put a brief question in Spanish. For answer, the overseer pointed at the Virginian.

"You and your comrades are evidently of the lawless class of English," said the *don*, leering at Drurie. "I know the country. The men are all either cringing shopkeepers or lawless ruffians. The women! Bah! High and low, they are all equally without virtue."

"You are a liar!" said Drurie.

"You are a dirty dog!" cried Cremona.

The *don's* leer deepened. "Lawlessness is a thing I dare not allow on this island," he said. "We live in peace and harmony here. I do not like to have my slaves attempt to murder the men I set over them."

He turned to the fellow whom Drurie had attacked on the previous day. "As we are short of hands," he said in Spanish, "and the crop is coming on, we cannot give them as much as I should like just now. Ten lashes apiece will do for to-day. Make haste, for I have not yet had my coffee."

There were four iron rings in the wall — two high up, two close to the ground. One of the overseers grabbed Drurie by the shoulder and began to push him across the yard toward the wall.

"Not so fast!" cried the *don*. "We'll serve our two fine gentlemen last of all. They'll enjoy watching the sport."

So the ruffian released the Virginian and seized the man who stood next in line. The poor fellow did not resist, though his hands were free. In a trice he was tied to the rings in the wall by wrists and ankles. His tattered shirt was torn roughly from his back. The short-stocked, long-lashed whip was swung back, and at the same moment the other overseer presented his pistols — one at Drurie and one at Cremona. The lashes whistled in the air and descended upon the flinching back. The *don* began to count aloud. Again the lashes swooped and fell. Again — and this time the blood sprang after the wire-tipped thongs, in dark lines across the white back. And so on, until ten

strokes had been methodically given and as methodically counted.

Then, poor Tyler was loosened from the wall, a bucketful of water was sloshed over his back and some sort of ointment was applied to the bruised and bleeding flesh. When the cords were untied he fell to the ground in a dead faint. He was carried into the hut by two negro slaves; and as soon as he regained consciousness a clean shirt was put upon him, and coffee and food were given him. It was important that he should be able to do his work, for this was a busy season of the year on the little island. The canes in sixty acres of the plantation were now ready for the knives of the reapers, and, along with the harvesting and boiling, many acres of young canes had still to be cultivated.

The two overseers took turn and turn about at applying the whip to the backs of the English mariners. The *don* counted the strokes and frequently cried for more haste, as he had not yet partaken of his first breakfast. When Nicholas was dragged to the wall, Drurie protested at the top of his voice.

"You fiend," he cried at the *don*, "can't you see that ten lashes will kill him? He is already all but dead with the fever."

The *don* walked over to Nicholas and examined him closely. "Yes, you are right," he said coolly. "The

fellow cost me money — and, also, I am short of hands. It will be a month's time, perhaps, before I can afford to give any of you your full measure of correction."

The Virginian's only reply was a look of such unutterable hate and scorn that the *don* flushed under his swarthy skin.

Last of all, Drurie was untied from the wall and allowed to return to the hut. He walked without assistance, clanking the chain between his feet. His face was luminous with a desperate pallor, and blood trickled down his lean back. He accepted the washing and dressing without a word, and ate bravely when food was brought to him. He drained his bowl of coffee to the last drop and then looked at his men, his glance passing tenderly from face to face.

" Keep up your courage, lads," said he, " for a low heart breeds fever — and fever is an enemy from whom I cannot deliver you. As for this swine who thinks he owns us! Lads, as surely as I was bred in Virginia, I'll show him to you before many days are gone, with a yard of iron through his belly."

Having gloated over the sight of Drurie's lacerated back until the gloom of the hut hid it from him, the planter passed again through the door in the wall by which he had entered the yard. By only the width

of one step — by the thickness of the wall — was the whipping-place separated from a garden paradise. In the one were glaring sunshine, terror, iron, and little drops of blood. In the other were blending of shadow and sunlight, rustling of high foliage, great blooms of hybiscus, and petals of red roses on the ground.

But the *don* was indifferent to the beauty of the one as to the ugliness of the other. He needed a garden. Therefore, the palms singing in the sea-breeze, lemon-trees leaning above benches of carved stone, along which green lizards darted in their play; therefore, the bells of the hybiscus flowers and the flaring blooms of the flambeau-trees; therefore, the roses budding and blowing. He must whip his slaves; and, therefore, the unshaded yard, the high wall, and the rings in the masonry.

Alcazardo passed under the green branches and flaring blooms and ascended a flight of steps to the gallery of his house. In the cool shade stood a table set for two. Here were white linen and gleaming silver. An old man stood beside the table.

"Tell the *señorita* that I am ready," ordered the *don*. The old man hurried away.

In a moment Isobel appeared, her face as white as the linen on the table and her eyes gleaming with tears. Her uncle sneered at her openly.

"Well, my daughter, what is the trouble with you?" he asked, with mocking tenderness in his voice.

The girl could not find courage to meet his cruel, searching regard. She was afraid that he might read what was in her heart — the hate, the contempt, the crouching fury that was so soon to strike.

"I am not well," she faltered. "I feel feverish and weak. I yearn for my home in Virginia."

He accepted this statement without a suspicion. "You must take some quinine and keep out of the sun," he said. "And as for your home in Virginia — well, you'll get there all in good time, my dear."

While eight of the new slaves toiled in the fields, and the lad Nicholas lay raving in the dark hut, Isobel and the fellow Laroche went steadily about their hidden work.

Before evening the little schooner *Twelve Apostles* put into the lagoon, with a cargo of stores for the island. The hearts of Isobel and Laroche lifted at the sight of her.

At last night came, and the men of the *Brave Adventure* dragged themselves back to the hut. They were chained in their places and fed. Drurie saw that the man on guard was the same fellow who had withheld his hand during the brief revolt of the previous day. He stood in the door of the hut, a black bulk against

the paler dark of the early night. The lads on the earthen floor, with iron in their souls as well as on their limbs, were desperate. Even Cremona had lost all sense of caution. They begged Drurie to let them fight as soon as they were unchained in the morning.

"Let us ease our souls a bit, sir, afore we die," pleaded Tyler. "'Twould be like liquor to us, sir, to kill some o' these fiends."

"If we do not fight soon, we'll have no strength to fight at all," said Cremona.

Before Drurie could answer, the guard turned and stepped close to him, and whispered something in Spanish.

"Tell it to me," said Cremona. "I know the talk."

Laroche moved to Cremona's side. "You must wait until to-morrow night," he whispered. "Then I will remove the chains and free your hands and your feet and give you each a cutlass. The *señorita* and I have arranged this. The other slaves are cowards; but they will rise when they know that you are already creeping upon the house. We shall kill the *don* and capture the schooner."

Cremona could scarcely believe the evidence of his ears.

"Are you honest in this — or is it some new torture?" he asked.

Laroche drew a crucifix from his breast and swore a great oath that he meant every word of what he had said.

"Then you shall be well paid for it, my friend. The captain is a rich man, and will be generous with you," said Cremona.

"Nay, I want no money from you," replied Laroche. "The *señorita* has promised me an honourable position and a sum of money — but my reward will be to see the blood of that black dog spurting out."

"Who is this *señorita?*" asked Cremona.

"They call her the *don's* daughter," whispered Laroche. "But I do not think this is so, for she hates the dog even as you and I hate him. We have had no courage to strike; but when you came, and the captain there looked as if he feared the *don* no more than a dead fish, then we found our courage. So you must keep your hearts covered until I come to you to-morrow night."

Without another word, the overseer went noiselessly back to the door of the hut, stood there a few moments with his musket across the hollow of his arm, and then stepped into the yard. From somewhere in the distance came the voices of the crew of the little schooner. The fellows were singing over their liquor.

Cremona crawled as close to Drurie as his chain would allow and whispered him the story of their

promised deliverance. And so, in fragments, it passed from one to another of the battered company. It put new life into them, and went to their heads like wine. Again the world was theirs, and they saw again the tall spars and white sails of ships and the hills and fields of their distant homes. The glad news set all hearts aglow with hope, save the heart of the lad Nicholas. He, poor fellow, had died quietly even while the overseer whispered in Cremona's ear.

At last sleep came to them, and silence filled that black hut where eight living men and one dead man lay chained on the earthen floor. Throughout the long night Drurie dreamed of Isobel and Virginia.

CHAPTER XXV

THE RISING

When Alcazardo heard next morning that one of his new slaves was dead, he fell into a fit of ungovernable fury. He had spared the fellow a whipping so that he might live — and, behold, the rascal had died, thus cheating the unfortunate *don* of the pleasure of counting ten more lashes as well as of the price paid to Duval. He raved like a madman; and as for the fellow who brought him the news, he received a blow on the side of the head from a candlestick that laid him flat for half the day.

Then the *don* set out for the field in which the English slaves were at work. He carried in his hand a long and limber stick of the West Indian vine called supplejack. Upon reaching the toiling, weary fellows, he laid about him cruelly, striking their aching legs and raw backs with merciless, slashing cuts.

"I'll soon have you all on the dunghill where your shipmate was thrown this morning," he cried.

At that, the Virginian's rage overcame his caution.

He straightened himself and looked the *don* up and down. "You shameless cur! The only white man you are not afraid of is a dead one," he cried.

Alcazardo sprang at him and struck him fair across the face with the heavy, fibrous stick. Twice he struck — and at the second blow Drurie fell without a sound.

When Drurie recovered consciousness it was to find himself on the earthen floor of the hut. His face and left eye ached with a dull throbbing that, at the slightest movement, sprang to excruciating activity. He lifted his hand cautiously and felt that his head and face were generously bandaged in damp cloths. At the discovery, thought of the *señorita*, of whom the overseer had spoken, came to him. The cloths that bound head and eyes were of fine linen, and a subtle fragrance of lavender exhaled from them. An overseer would have bandaged his wounds with very different material, he reflected. Could it be that the *señorita*, that mysterious and merciful being, had tended him with her own hands? How strongly, sweetly familiar this scent of lavender!

Francis Drurie felt a light, light touch on his hand. It brought him back from a sweet half dream of Virginia.

"You must drink this," whispered a muffled voice at his ear. He felt a tender arm behind his head and

the cool rim of a cup against his lips. He drank the wine and water, helpless and obedient as a child.

"Is it the merciful *señorita?*" he asked when the cup was withdrawn.

"Yes," came the reply, in a faint but thrilling whisper.

"I do not ask your reason for planning to save us, but I thank you with all my heart," he said. "If you, too, wish to be saved from this place of despair — madam, I ask no questions — I shall blithely risk my life to save you. It is for the love of one merciful and beautiful woman that I cling to life — then in the service of another as merciful, and perhaps as beautiful, let me lose it."

"What is the name of the woman you love?" asked the voice of the *señorita*, so low that he could scarcely hear the words.

"Isobel," replied Drurie frankly. It was like food to his hungry heart to speak of his love.

"Then, for her sake, you must save yourself and me," came the faint reply. "Before midnight your chains shall be unfastened. Be wise and brave. For her sake — Heaven prosper you, my captain."

He felt the touch of lips on his hand. Quick as thought, for all the blindness of his bandaged eyes, he caught one of her hands and pressed it to his lips.

For hours Drurie lay there, alone, his heart full of hope and of a strange, sweet excitement. He thought of the *señorita* — and it was the vision of Isobel that came to his mind. This was a mad thing, but none the less exhilarating for its madness. He gave his imagination free wing. The hand he had kissed became the hand of the beautiful girl he loved. He pictured Isobel in that dank hut, kneeling on the earthen floor and supporting his head on one white and rounded arm and holding the cup to his lips. At last he heard the shuffling of naked, blistered feet and the clanking of irons, and he knew that the day of toil was over and the night of deliverance at hand.

Then reason returned to his brain, but not to his heart. His brain told him that the approaching hour held nothing for him but a battle and the chance of life — or death. Yet his heart played with the mad dream of the girl he loved.

Food and water were brought to the eight survivors. Even Drurie forced a little of the unsavoury mess down his throat. In broken whispers the plan of the attack was passed along the wall from one to another of the shackled slaves.

They were slaves no longer. Already their hearts were free and the chains on their aching bodies forgotten. Again they were sailors and soldiers, and a

fight was close at hand. Sweet is rest after strife; but sweeter still is strife after slavery and torture, hope after despair.

They waited in the dark hut, whispering, joking a little. They could hear the other slaves, in their distant quarters, chanting a wild, tuneless song.

Hall, a big New Englander, began snapping the joints of his fingers. "I must supple 'em up a bit," he whispered, "so's to get a good grip on the cutlass."

"Aye, an' mine be as stiff as wood," replied another; "but they'll limber, I reckon, when they feel the shark-skin grip o' a good hanger."

"There be no cuttin'-tool in the world so sweet to handle as a fust-class English-made hanger," said Tyler, with relish in his tones.

At last Laroche and two blacks entered the hut. The blacks carried cutlasses wrapped in sacking. Laroche carried a clay jug full of water and rum and fresh limes. He placed it on the earthen floor and felt his way to where Drurie sat against the wall. He unlocked the great chain from the Virginian's waist, and then struck off the irons from wrist and leg. And so with the other seven, working swiftly and noiselessly. When all were free, without a word they went to where the two bundles of cutlasses lay on the ground, and each selected a weapon to suit his hand and arm.

Then, also in silence, each drank a measure of the revivifying punch. As there was only one cup they drank in turn, according to their old ratings aboard the *Brave Adventure.*

The night was windless and a mist hung between the stars and the earth. The eight, accompanied by Laroche and the two blacks who had brought them their weapons, stole from the hut and across the little yard. Drurie still wore a bandage around his head and over his injured eye; but he had parted the damp and fragrant folds of the linen so that he could see with his right eye.

At the gate in the wall they divided into two parties. Cremona, with Hall, Waller, and Hogan and the two blacks, went down the slope toward the lagoon where a lantern in the rigging of the little schooner glowed like a red star. Tyler, Benson, and Jarvis, led by Drurie and Laroche, crawled slowly and noiselessly through the garden toward the house.

At last, peering between the rose-bushes, Drurie caught sight of the *don* taking his ease with the master of the *Twelve Apostles.* The two rascals sat scarcely ten yards away, at a small table at the top of the gallery steps. Two candles stood on the table, the flames straight as darts in the nerveless air. The men were leaning forward, smoking and talking confidentially.

Glasses and a round-bellied decanter gleamed between them in the soft glow of the candles. The heart of the decanter, being of choice and ancient rum from Martinique, shone red as a ruby.

Drurie was motionless as stone, crouched there close to the warm earth, gripping the hilt of his cutlass with fingers as hard as iron. And his heart was hard as iron, though heated red with hate of the man who sat so close to him, leering behind the candles.

He thought of his dead servant, the lad Nicholas, and of the blood springing across the backs of his men. He remembered the stinging, crushing strokes of the stick across his face. His men stirred behind him, gripping and regripping their weapons and gasping nervously for a full breath of the heavy air.

Laroche touched Drurie's arm and whispered that the lantern was being lowered from the rigging of the schooner. Drurie got quietly to his feet, paused for a moment to hear his men rise behind him, and then dashed for the gallery. The table went over with a crash of glass and silver and the candles were trampled under foot.

"Hold them, lads," cried Drurie. "Do not kill! It is for me to kill!"

In the dark it was hard to know when you were killing a man and when you were simply trying to keep

him from killing you. The lads did their best to obey their commander's orders; but when Laroche came suddenly from the interior of the house with two fresh candles in his hands, the master of the little schooner was found to be lying flat on the floor of the gallery, stone dead.

Benson and Jarvis held the *don*, faint, but uninjured. A cheer rang across from the little vessel in the lagoon; and from the direction of the slaves' quarters, where the overseers and drivers had been making merry with the crew of the schooner, came sounds as of wild beasts in mortal combat.

"They have lost their fear of the *don* and his hirelings," said Drurie, with a shudder.

More candles were brought from the house. Some were placed on the ledges of the windows, and some on the rail of the gallery. The shipmaster's body and the chairs and broken table were tossed into the garden.

"Now, lads," said Drurie, "I am going to kill this dog in fair fight. Guard the steps, one of you. Give him a cutlass, some one."

He turned to the limp figure in the grip of the two Englishmen. "I'll give you a chance to die like a man, even if you have never lived like one," he said.

Laroche handed his former master a cutlass. "You will remember my back when this gentleman drives a

foot of iron into your dirty carcass," he said, grinning.

The seamen released Alcazardo. He held the cutlass limply and stood like a man in a dream.

"Lads," said Drurie, "low as this fellow is, I want to kill him fair. If he disables me, or kills me, you must let him go free — though where to, the devil only knows. He may have a boat hidden somewhere, in which he'll be able to row away to some other island. However that may be, if he beats me in fair fight you must let him go. But you need not fear. I promised to show you his blood, and I'll do it."

Laroche smiled quietly. He was not bound by any rules of honesty in matters of this kind, as were the Virginian and the sailors. He had his cutlass ready, alert to strike the *don* at the first sign of his overpowering the other.

Fired with the courage of desperation, the *don* attacked strongly, ringing cut after cut on Drurie's guard. Both his eyes were at his service and his arm was long. At first it seemed to the onlookers as if he would surely overcome his small and enfeebled antagonist.

Then, suddenly, Drurie halted in his slow and staggering retreat; and in the instant of ceasing to retreat he began to advance. He saw that he must make

a great effort, even if at the expense of all his strength. His short blade circled and stabbed — a rapier and a sabre in one. He moved swiftly and lightly, to the right, to the left, and forward.

Tyler chuckled. Laroche swore softly in admiration. Then the *don* screamed at the bite of an inch of cold steel in his shoulder and lurched to one side. The candles toppled from the rail into the garden. A back-handed sweep of his blade sent the other candles flying from the window-sill.

"He's gone! After him, my lads!" cried Drurie.

The *don* had escaped, sure enough. Clearing the railing of the gallery at a bound, he dashed through the rose-garden, through a hedge of flowering shrubs, and into a field of full-grown canes; and hot on his trail dashed Laroche, the three English sailors, and half a dozen blacks. The night was dark and the trail thick with blinds.

Drurie did not follow his antagonist. He had put every ounce of his strength into the combat with the Spaniard, and now a sudden swirling faintness overtook him. He reeled to the open door and peered within. The great hall was dark; but he made out a gleam of white close in front of him.

"Are you safe, *señorita?*" he cried. Then he fell across the threshold.

Around the house, and through the canes, the slaves still hunted. Their fierce, exultant cries rang far and wide over the little island. Cremona and his men held the little schooner. Laroche, three of the English seamen, and a few blacks guarded the house. They knew that as soon as the hunting was over the mad pack would loot and destroy the house.

"We must hurry, *señorita*," said Laroche. "Let two of these men carry their captain. We must get aboard the schooner before the beasts outside become quite mad. They have found the rum — and they have tasted blood."

But at that moment Francis Drurie came back to the world. Looking up, he saw the face of Isobel Dariza close above him, the wonderful eyes agleam with tears.

"It is another vision," he said, weakly.

Then the face came closer, and he felt her lips upon his.

Captain Denis St. Ovide Duval sighted the little island shortly before noon; and as he drew near a small schooner passed across his course, not a mile distant, and headed northward.

"Let her go," said he. "She'd not be worth the trouble of overhauling."

When he arrived off the entrance to the lagoon he

beheld a smouldering ruin where the *don's* fine house had stood; and a mob of wild creatures, armed with cane-knives, shouted defiance from the beach. Had he been foolhardy enough to force a landing he might have stumbled across the lifeless and mutilated body of the Señor Josef Alcazardo.

THE END.

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